**Kinship Friendly Employer Scheme: Frequently Asked Questions**

***Purpose: To provide answers to often asked questions about the Kinship Friendly Employer Scheme and kinship care for HR professionals, line managers and kinship carer staff.***

***This could be used when an employer is considering becoming a Kinship Friendly Employer; to share with managers as policies are implemented and to share with staff after implementation.***

***You could also personalise this with questions and answers about your organisation’s individual policies.***

**FAQs: Employers**

**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. This often happens unexpectedly, with the majority of kinship carers stepping up in a time of crisis. In England and Wales, we estimate there are more than 162,000 children in kinship care.

Grandparents are the most common kinship carers, but siblings, aunts, uncles, and people who know the child well can also take on the role.

Most children are in kinship care because their parents are not able to look after them, sometimes due to mental health illness, or living with addiction, or if the parents die or go to prison. Many children in kinship care have experienced trauma and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are also more prevalent.

Kinship care provides a loving, stable home life where they can grow and develop in a safe, positive environment and they also get to stay in their existing family network.

Kinship care differs to foster care as kinship care involves placing the child with a relative or another person who has a pre-existing relationship with the child as opposed to a non-relative, who has chosen, trained and become licensed to be a foster carer, regulated by a local authority.

**What different types of kinship carer are there?**

* **Informal kinship care arrangements** are when a close family member or friend look after a child for a temporary or permanent amount of time. This arrangement is agreed privately with the parents and parental responsibility for the child remains with the birth parents.
* **Kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order (CAO)** are granted an order by the family court that determines who a child can live with and who a child can stay with and how long for. The kinship carer shares parental responsibility with the child’s birth parents until the age of 18, unless the court states otherwise. In 2014, Child Arrangement Orders replaced Residence Orders.
* **Kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)** have parental responsibility for a child following a private law order made by the family court. Kinship carers live permanently with their children although they are liable to keep the birth parents updated on important decisions such as changing the child’s surname or putting them up for adoption.
* **Family foster kinship carers** look after kinship children who are “looked after” by the local authority following an informal agreement or an interim care order, a full care order or emergency protection order is made by the family court.

**How many kinship carers work in this organisation?**

Based on census data (2011) and estimates of the % of working age kinship carers they are, we estimate at least 0.22% of any workforce are kinship carers. This is likely to be higher in areas where kinship care is more prevalent (e.g. the North East of England) and in lower-paid roles where we know kinship carers are likely over-represented.

**What statutory period of leave are kinship carers entitled to?**

Currently there is no statutory provision for kinship care leave as there is with other family leave types such as maternity leave and adoption leave.

This is something that Kinship charity is trying to change and is calling on the UK government to introduce statutory kinship care leave, available to all kinship carers, on a par with adoption leave.

**What other statutory work entitlements are kinship carers entitled to?**

Some kinship carers, depending on the legal status their child or children has, and their employment status may be entitled to parental leave and dependents leave.

They may have some more general employment and/or contractual rights around the right to request flexible working, which may change in Spring 2024 when the Employment Relations (flexible working) Act is due to come into effect.

Many kinship carers feedback that they are not clear on what workplace entitlements they are able to access as these are often described in the context of parents.

**Should I make my policies applicable to all kinship carers, or just those with legal recognition?**

We strongly recommend policies and support are available to all kinship carers regardless of legal order. Some kinship carers have informal arrangements as there isn’t a need for a legal order, some cannot afford to obtain a legal order and others may be in the process of obtaining one, which can take some time. Kinship very much encourages employers to be inclusive and make policies available to all kinship carers.

**What documentation should kinship carers provide to prove eligibility?**

Given the different types of kinship carer arrangement, there isn’t any one single piece of evidence that all kinship carers will be able to provide of their kinship carer status.

Some options may include:

* A copy of a legal order (though even if the kinship carer is applying for an order, court orders can take many months to obtain).
* A letter from a local authority social worker, (similar to where a social worker signs a form in order for a kinship carer to be exempt from the two-child limit for Child Tax Credits).
* Where the local authority isn’t involved, a letter from a school/college/other education or early years setting, or health professional, housing or other local authority department or prison authority.
* Evidence of any relevant benefits from the DWP (eg child benefit, Guardian’s Allowance).

However, in order to be inclusive of all kinship carers, we recommend that employers do not require kinship carers to prove eligibility where this is not easy for them to provide, and take a good faith approach.

**How can an organisation become a Kinship Friendly Employer?**

Kinship’s free Kinship Friendly Employer scheme provides a framework to help employers implement Kinship Friendly policies. These will enable kinship carers who want to stay in work to maintain their income, job security and career prospects whilst stepping up to take on caring responsibilities for a child they love.

All employers are able to become Kinship Friendly Employers.

Recognising the lack of statutory underpinning of policies such as kinship care leave and the financial constraints many organisations are facing, the Kinship Friendly Employers Scheme includes Bronze, Silver and Gold standard tiers to enable employers to introduce the Kinship Friendly Employer policies that can be accommodated by an individual business. This allows an organisation to cross-reference existing and new policies to ascertain what standard they will be recognised at as a Kinship Friendly Employer by us.

Meeting these standards and being recognised as a kinship friendly employer will demonstrate to your workforce, suppliers, stakeholders and prospective employees that you value, understand and support kinship carers. You will receive recognition from us, as the leading kinship care charity, for meeting a high threshold of support. Employers can move up through the tiers over time as more policies are amended or introduced.

As a starting point, you can access our free [Kinship Friendly Employer toolkit](https://kinship.org.uk/get-involved/kinship-friendly-employers/) which includes template policies, checklists, and guidance for HR and line managers.

Supporting kinship carers in your workforce will mean more kinship carers stay in work, contributing to your organisation, the economy and society- and of course, changing the lives of the children they look after.

**What are the benefits of being a Kinship Friendly Employer?**

By becoming a Kinship Friendly Employer, you will be recognised as an organisation that wants to support their employees with balancing their work whilst looking after their children. You will be seen as leading in the industry and an inclusive and supportive employer, leading to less attrition and a happier, more committed and loyal workforce. Kinship will work with you to:

* Publicise and promote your Kinship Friendly Employer status on Kinship’s website, social media channels and external communications.
* Introduce you to other organisations and industry bodies to forge connections with other Kinship Friendly Employers, and share learnings and best practice.
* Collaborate around Kinship Care Week (each October), promoting your commitment to kinship carers during this week.
* Signpost kinship carers in your workforce to Kinship’s free and independent advice, information and support services (available to kinship carers in England and Wales).

**How do Kinship Friendly Employer policies interact with existing Family Friendly policies?**

We would encourage you to ensure that kinship carers are included in all of your existing family friendly policies. It is up to you whether you want to include references to kinship care in your existing policies or produce a bespoke policy for kinship carers.

**How can the organisation also raise awareness of kinship care and support for kinship carers amongst the workforce?**

You can use the template intranet article we have included in the [Kinship Friendly Employer toolkit](https://kinship.org.uk/get-involved/kinship-friendly-employers/) in your internal communications and signpost kinship carers in England and Wales to Kinship.org.uk and our Kinship Compass – <https://compass.kinship.org.uk/> - a free, independent online hub for advice, information and support.

We expect all organisations that sign up to be Kinship Friendly Employers, from Bronze standard upwards to provide signposting and information for kinship carers in the workforce via staff intranet, internal communications or similar and to promote annual Kinship Care Week to staff members.

You can use the template intranet article we have included in the toolkit in your internal communications and signpost kinship carers in England and Wales in your workforce to www.kinship.org.uk and specifically our Kinship Compass – a free, independent online hub for advice, information and support at https://compass.kinship.org.uk/.

**FAQs: Line managers**

**Where can I learn more about kinship care?**

Find out more about kinship care at [www.kinship.org.uk](http://www.kinship.org.uk/) including:

* Information about the different types of kinship care; <https://compass.kinship.org.uk/advice-and-information/what-is-kinship-care/>.
* Read [reports](https://kinship.org.uk/breaking-point/) about the experiences of kinship carers in England in Wales.
* Watch a [short animation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IDYP3lrmvE) about kinship care from a child’s perspective.

**How do I have sensitive conversations about kinship care?**

The [Kinship Friendly Employer toolkit](https://kinship.org.uk/get-involved/kinship-friendly-employers/) has handy guidance for managers with tips about how to talk about kinship care with colleagues and have sensitive and supportive conversations with kinship carer staff about their circumstances and needs. Overall, organisations should aim to take an employee led approach. Employers should ask kinship carer employees what they need in terms of support, or provide an alternative option.

**What needs might a kinship carer have and how can I support them?**

There is little support available from the Government and Local Authorities for kinship carers, and that which is available can be different depending on the legal status of the kinship carer, or where they live.

Kinship carers can sometimes worry about being stigmatised – perhaps they are caring for children because the children’s parent(s) are in prison, or have mental health illness or are suffering with addiction – or looking like they’re struggling to cope, especially financially. Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are over-represented in kinship care, and many of the children (both those with and without SEND) have experienced adverse childhood experiences and trauma which can impact on their mental health, behaviour and development, often requiring greater support from their kinship carer.

Kinship surveyed 500+ kinship carers for its recent [Forced Out report](https://kinship.org.uk/forced-out/), and found a lack of sufficient support in the workplace. 68% of respondents were offered no support by their employer when they became a kinship carer, which led to;

* 41% leaving work permanently;
* 45% reducing their hours;
* 25% changing their employment status in another way (e.g. switching to remote working, changing roles, taking unpaid leave).

When respondents were asked what support they needed from employers:

* 39% said paid leave;
* 36% said flexible working;
* 27% said reduced hours;
* 12% said remote working;
* 8% said unpaid leave.

Kinship carers sharing their experiences of work often anecdotally feedback to Kinship that having the support of their line manager would play an important role in making their work-life balance easier. Having someone who understands their needs, the unpredictability of kinship care, the high needs of their children and is able to approach all of this with flexibility is key to underpinning excellent Kinship Friendly Employer policies.

**Where could I direct a kinship carer for specialist support?**

You can signpost kinship carers in England and Wales to www.kinship.org.uk and its [Kinship Compass](https://compass.kinship.org.uk/advice-and-information/what-is-kinship-care/) – a free, independent online hub for advice, information and support.

**FAQs: Kinship carer staff members**

**I have become a kinship carer unexpectedly at short notice – how do I talk to my line manager?**

Becoming a kinship carer often happens at short notice and as a Kinship Friendly Employer, your organisation will be aware of this and understand what support you might need.

Ask for a meeting with your line manager but remember that you don’t need to share anything more with than is needed to share in order to discuss your support needs. This includes not needing to share the reasons why a child/children are coming into your care if you don’t feel comfortable talking about this.

Think in advance of the meeting about what support you need in order to be able to take on your new caring responsibilities. You may not know the answer to this straight away, particularly if you have become a kinship carer at short notice so ask your manager to talk through the options with you.

**Where can I seek specialist information, advice and support about kinship care?**

Kinship charity offers free advice, information and support for kinship carers at https://compass.kinship.org.uk/

**What are my legal entitlements to paid leave?**

Currently there is no statutory provision for kinship care leave as there is with other family leave types such as maternity leave and adoption leave.

This is something that Kinship charity is trying to change and is calling on the UK government to introduce statutory kinship care leave, available to all kinship carers, on a par with adoption leave.

Some kinship carers, depending on the legal status their child or children has, and their employment status may be entitled to parental leave (only for kinship carers who have parental responsibility under a Special Guardianship Order) and dependents leave.

**What are my legal entitlements to requesting Flexible Working?**

You may have some more general employment and/or contractual rights around the right to request flexible working, which may change in Spring 2024 when the Employment Relations (flexible working) Act is due to come into effect. You can read all about current legal entitlements on the ACAS website.

**I have taken on the care of two or more siblings – does this change any of my workplace entitlements?**

If you took on the care of more than one child as a kinship carer at the same time, your entitlements would be the same as if you took on the care of one child. If you took on the care of two children as a kinship carer at different times, you would be eligible for the workplace entitlements for a kinship carer each time you took on the care of a child.