**Kinship Friendly Employer Scheme: Guidance for Line Managers**

***Purpose: This document provides practical guidance for line managers on how they can support colleagues who are kinship carers, through day-to-day line management and as well through an organisation’s Kinship Friendly Employer policies and the processes individual organisations will have in place to support the implementation of these.***

**Understanding the needs of kinship carers as a line manager**

Kinship care often happens unexpectedly, and at a time of crisis. The majority of kinship carers don’t choose to take on caring responsibilities for their kinship children, rather they step up in a time of crisis to keep them with people they know and love, and out of the care system.

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, 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, meaning that;

* 41% left work permanently;
* 45% reduced their hours;
* 25% changed their employment status in another way (e.g. switching to remote working).

We found that the main areas of support required were the maintaining of an income and the want of flexibility from employers:

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

Kinship carers fed back 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.

**Providing line manager support**

* **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
* **Listen, show an interest – but respect boundaries** and if there is anything your colleague would prefer not to talk about, or to keep confidential.
* **Ask your colleague what sort of support they think they need** – they may have a good idea of what it could be and would value the opportunity to share this with you.
* **Be empathetic – not judgmenta**l. Kinship care can often happen in traumatic circumstances, where complex family dynamics are at play, which might make a colleague worried about sharing too much, or about being judged.
* **Be flexible where you can be** – if there are ways you can accommodate requests for flexibility (either as per your organisation’s policies, or as per line manager discretion), these could make a huge difference for kinship carers, especially if they suddenly need to attend an appointment with a social worker, or a court date for their kinship child. Where the business needs mean you are unable to be as flexible, explain this clearly and try to work with the kinship carer to find resolutions that work for the organisation and the employee.
* **Think about wider resources they might be able to access** which could help them – for example, if you have access to an Employee Assistance Programme or Virtual GP, you could remind them about this, or similar about any Mental Health First Aid initiatives at work where they might be able to access additional support for themselves.