



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

Handle With Care

Annual survey of kinship carers 2025

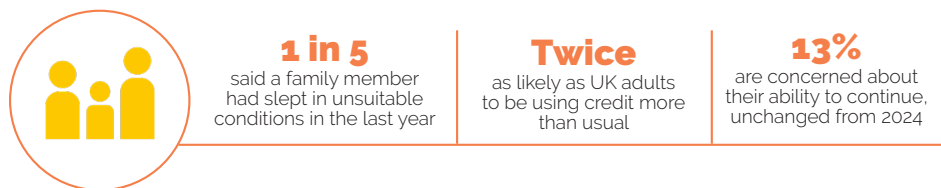
Executive summary

Handle With Care, published ahead of Kinship Care Week 2025, shares key findings from Kinship's 2025 annual survey of more than 1,900 kinship carers to provide an updated 'state of the nation' overview of kinship families. It offers new insight into how kinship carers and their children are managing this year and how particular experiences with finances, support and health are changing, set in the context of ongoing kinship care policy and practice reform.

Kinship families in 2025

Financial hardship remains a core part of many families' lives, experiences of sleeping in unsuitable conditions are common, and poor support presents a significant continued risk to children's stability.

A substantial proportion of kinship families continue to experience significant challenges, risking children's experiences and outcomes. The high cost of living is threatening kinship families' long term financial health above and beyond other UK adults. Incidences of family members sleeping on sofas, chairs and floors so that kinship children have somewhere to sleep are far too common. Worryingly, the percentage of kinship carers concerned about their ability to continue, most often as a result of challenges managing children's social, emotional and mental health needs, remains unchanged.



However, there are some signs of improving kinship family experiences and local authority support, albeit from a very low base.

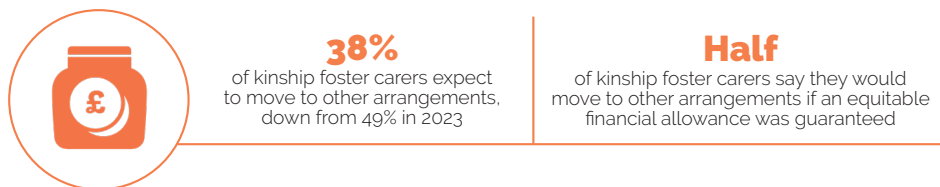
Kinship carers' health and experiences of loneliness are improving, but continue to remain stubbornly lower than for other UK adults and especially those of a similar age profile. Ratings of local authority support, information and trust are also improving following investment in specialist training and support services for kinship carers.



Policy context in 2025

Kinship Allowance Pilot

Our additional new evidence of kinship foster carers' expectations of movement to other kinship arrangements and the role of improved financial support suggests the UK Government's Kinship Allowance Pilot – which will test the delivery of guaranteed financial allowances in up to 10 local authorities in England – should be accelerated to deliver improved experiences and outcomes for children, families and the public purse.



Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

Awareness amongst kinship carers of the new kinship local offer requirement and extended remit of virtual school heads (VSH) – both strengthened within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, currently going through Parliament – must be improved to ensure kinship families get the information and advice they are eligible for.

Although some reported positive experiences of family group decision making (FGDM), kinship carers overwhelmingly spoke of being poorly supported to participate and take forward resultant plans, leading to negative outcomes. Increased use of FGDM, without accompanying reforms to improve support for family networks and kinship families as recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, risks exacerbating current dysfunctionality within our kinship care system and encouraging greater use of less well-supported kinship care arrangements.



Recommendations

Improving support for kinship families

The UK and Welsh Governments should equalise financial support between kinship carers and foster carers. The UK Government's Kinship Allowance Pilot should be accelerated and new guidance published to reduce unacceptable levels of variation and poor practice in the delivery of financial support. In the interim, local authorities should emulate leading practice and provide non-means tested allowances. The UK Government's parental leave and pay review should recommend a new right to statutory paid employment leave for kinship carers.

Local authorities should proceed at pace to deliver their kinship local offers and improve the information and signposting provided to all kinship carers. Governments and local authorities should invest in the delivery of tailored and accessible training and support services for kinship carers, including peer support, paying particular attention to support around children's social, emotional and mental health needs and circumstances which increase the risk of family instability.

Building a new kinship care system

It is crucial that the UK Government gets the sequencing of reform right and works at pace to improve the financial, practical and emotional support available to kinship families – including the further rollout of Family Network Support Packages – in order to generate the right legislative, funding and practice framework in the context of the incoming new duty to offer family group decision making (FGDM). Future guidance and research on FGDM should consider the views and experiences of kinship families.

Future policy development should explore how local authorities can actively support progression to more permanent kinship care arrangements without necessitating entry into local authority care to secure long-term eligibility for support.