



University
of Exeter



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

Making a Support Plan

A Kinship Care Companion

April 2026

**Guidance
for Kinship
Carers**



This guide was developed from the [Understanding kinship carer networks](#) research project led by the University of Exeter in partnership with Kinship and supported by CoramBAAF.

Acknowledgements

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"This guidance comes from our hearts to yours and was born from our own long hours and difficult journeys. We've walked the path you're on, and we know just how heavy it can feel. We've poured our collective experiences into these pages because we believe no carer should have to struggle in the dark. Our deepest hope is that this guide lights a smoother way forward."

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What is a support plan?

A support plan is a written agreement between a local authority and kinship carer which sets out the support that will be provided, who is responsible for delivering it, and when it should happen.

In some situations, such as when a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is being made, the local authority is expected to set out what support will be provided. In other kinship arrangements, a support plan may not be required in the same way but having one is still good practice.

In reality, support plans are helpful for all kinship carers. Writing support down clearly helps everyone understand what has been agreed, who will do what, and when. It can give you confidence that support is in place for you and your family to help address challenges early, before they become more difficult to manage. But support plans don't have to be limited to the start of the process, they can be developed or updated at any point in the kinship journey.

Kinship families will come from many racial, ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds. Some families experience additional barriers due to inequality within services and systems. A good support plan should also recognise these realities and ensure support is fair, culturally responsive, and actively addresses barriers linked to race, faith, ethnicity, and heritage.

Why is a support plan important?

A good support plan can:

- **Give clarity and reassurance** – so you know what support is in place, who is responsible, and what you can expect.
- **Help get support early** – putting the right help in place before problems or pressures build up.
- **Support you and your child over time** – recognising that needs change as children grow and family life evolves.
- **Provide accountability and consistency** – giving you something written to rely on, even if workers or services change.



How can this guide help?

This guide is here to **help you talk with professionals about the support you and your kinship child(ren) may need**. It has been developed with and for kinship carers, to help make sure you get the support you and your family need. You don't need to know all the answers. You can use this as a checklist or bring it to support planning meetings or reviews to help guide the conversation.

Your local authority should also have a **kinship local offer** explaining what support is available locally. This can be a useful starting point when thinking about what help you and your family might need.

Your support plan belongs to you

You should be able to:



- Request and receive a copy in a format that you can use
- Have time to consider, discuss, and agree the plan before it is finalised
- Be supported to help shape the plan, so it reflects your family and circumstances
- Know who to contact if support is delayed or not delivered
- Expect the plan to be reviewed and updated as needs change
- Be supported to consider where independent legal advice may be helpful

Planning support together

These questions are here to **help you think about what support might help** and to **guide conversations with professionals** supporting you to make your plan. They can be used when you are first starting out, or at later stages during reviews. Because support plans can sometimes be used in legal proceedings, it's **important that the wording clearly reflects what has been agreed**. Don't hesitate to ask questions or request clearer wording if you are unsure about anything.

1. Understanding your Kinship Child

Their past, their experiences, and what this means now

- Have I been given enough information about my kinship child's history to help me care for them well and safely?
- If information is being limited now, can I ask for it in the future?
- Has it been explained how past experiences might affect my kinship child's behaviour or emotions over time?
- Do I feel prepared for challenges that may emerge later, not just now?

Everyday life, relationships, and settling in

- Have we talked about my relationship with the child before they came to live with me?
- Do I understand my kinship child's everyday needs and preferences (routines, food, comfort items, hobbies) and how these can be supported?

- Have we discussed how to build trust and attachment and the training and strategies to do this?
- Do I know where to get help if I need support around bonding?
- Have we considered how this change affects everyone else in the household (including other children)?
- Have we talked about how my kinship child might react to new routines or boundaries?
- Do I have practical advice or support to manage resistance or challenging behaviour?

School, learning and additional needs

- Does the school recognise and understand our kinship family circumstances, and is there a plan for regular communication or check-ins?
- Do I have a clear understanding of any diagnosed or emerging learning, developmental, mental health, or behavioural needs?
- Have any assessments, diagnoses, or support plans (for example education or health plans) been shared with me and explained clearly?
- Do I understand the role of the Virtual School?
- Do I understand how the race of my child may impact exclusions, SEND identification, or behaviour management?
- Do I know who can support me if I have concerns about unfair treatment, bias, or discrimination affecting my child's experience at school?

Emotional and therapeutic support

- Have we talked about support to help my kinship child process trauma, loss, or change?
- Have we discussed help to support age-appropriate conversations about their past, family, relationships, or identity?
- Is there guidance or support available to help me understand my kinship child's behaviour and respond in ways that support their emotional needs?
- If specialist support is needed, has it been explained what other support can be put in place while waiting?

Identity and cultural needs

- Have we talked about my kinship child's race, identity, faith or heritage?
- How can I be supported to help my kinship child stay connected to what matters to them, including cultural traditions?
- Have we talked about how racial bias or discrimination may affect my child, and what support could help them navigate this over time?
- If I am caring for a child from a different racial or cultural background to mine, what training or guidance will I be offered?

2. Support for you as the Carer

Emotional and physical wellbeing

- Have we discussed how this change to my family may impact me, my relationships, my work and my emotions?
- Do I know where to turn if I personally need support?
- Have we talked about my physical wellbeing and whether any support might be helpful for me over time?
- Have we talked about whether I experience barrier or discrimination when accessing services, and what support is available if this happens?
- Are there peer support groups or opportunities that reflect my cultural or racial background, if this would be helpful to me?

Guidance, training, and preparation

- Have we talked about what information or guidance might help me understand my kinship child's background and needs?
- Have I been told what training or preparation might be helpful for me now or as things change?
- Have I been offered legal advice or told how I can access it now or in the future?

Breaks and respite

- Have we talked about what would help me get time to rest or recharge, and how this could be supported?
- Have we talked about who might be able to help with breaks or respite, such as family members, friends, or other trusted people and if they need to be DBS checked?
- Have my kinship child or young person's views been included, including who they enjoy spending time with and feel comfortable visiting?

3. Financial, Housing and Practical Support

Finances

- Do I understand what financial help I may be entitled to, including whether there is a kinship carers' allowance, any restrictions (such as means testing), and how long this support will last?
- Has someone checked I'm getting the right benefits or allowances?
- Do I know where to get specialist benefits, tax or debt advice?
- Has any available help with one-off costs been discussed (e.g. equipment, clothing furniture or adapting the home)?
- Have we talked about how costs may change as my kinship child grows-up, and when financial support will be reviewed? (e.g. school uniforms, digital access, or higher education).
- If relevant, has my immigration or residency status been considered when assessing support?

Housing

- What support is available to ensure our home is suitable and safe for my kinship child and family, both now and in the longer-term?
- Have any concerns about space been considered?
- Do I know what housing support might be available locally?

4. Family Relationships and Contact

Parent contact and family time

- Is there a clear, written contact plan and does it include everyone who is important to the child?
- Have the emotional effects of the contact plan on the child been discussed?
- How will contact be managed safely and practically, including any costs involved and how these will be covered?
- Do I know what to do if contact becomes difficult or needs to be reviewed?

Wider family relationships

- Have we talked about how the kinship arrangement has affected wider family relationships?
- Is there support available to help manage conflict or difficult conversations, such as mediation or help relaying information?

5. Your Support Network

Connections, peer support, and help

- Have we talked about who I can rely on for help or support day to day?
- Do I know who to contact if I need urgent help or if things feel overwhelming?
- If I feel isolated, have we discussed ways I could connect with other kinship carers or supportive groups?

6. Reviews and Accountability

- Do I have a written copy of my support plan?
- Can information be provided in my preferred language?
- Is it clear who is responsible for the support and who to contact if it isn't delivered?
- Do I know who my main point of contact will be?
- Do I know when it will be reviewed and how to arrange it?
- Have we planned review dates around key transitions (such as school changes or preparing for adulthood)?
- Does the plan ensure support is fair and responsive to my family's faith, racial, cultural, and community needs?
- Do I know who to notify and the information they will need should my circumstances change? (e.g. relationship change, or moving house)

Essentials every support plan should include



You can use this checklist to make sure your support plan covers the key areas and includes the information that matters to your family:

1. Understanding of your Kinship Child

- a) Their health, emotional and developmental needs
- b) Their school, friendships and any learning support needs
- c) Identity and cultural needs, including whether any discrimination or stigma may impact their experiences or behaviour
- d) What will help them settle and feel secure
- e) Support if they've experienced trauma, loss or change, including culturally appropriate support if needed

2. Support for you as the Carer

- a) Supporting your emotional, identity and physical health
- b) Help to stay connected with other people
- c) Training
- d) Peer support and/or respite options
- e) Information, advice, and guidance tailored to your situation

3. Financial, Housing and Practical Support

- a) Any financial support you will receive — what, how much, and for how long
- b) Who to speak to about benefits or financial advice
- c) What housing support is available if space or safety is an issue
- d) Help with transport, childcare, or household adjustments where needed
- e) Consideration of future or changing costs as your kinship child grows

4. Family Relationships and Contact

- a) How and when contact with parents/family will happen
- b) Where support or mediation will come from if required
- c) How children's wishes and feelings will be considered

5. Your Support Network

- a) Who you can rely on day-to-day
- b) Who can provide breaks or emotional support
- c) Links to peer groups, community networks or specialist charities
- d) What help you need if your support network changes or shrinks

6. Reviews and Accountability

- a) When it will next be reviewed (e.g. 12/24 months)
- b) Who is responsible for coordinating the review
- c) What happens if circumstances change
- d) Who to contact if support isn't delivered

Places to get information and advice



Kinship Carer Support

Kinship Compass (enter postcode to identify local support including peer groups, your local offer, virtual school lead, food banks and legal advice centre)

<https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/kinship-compass/>

Kinship free training and support:

<https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/training-and-events/>

Kinship Advice Line <https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/talk-to-someone/contact-the-kinship-advice-team/>

Kinship advice guides:

<https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/advice-and-information/>

Kinship's detailed list of helpful organisations:

<https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/advice-and-information/helpful-organisations/>

CoramBAAF Kinship Care Page (with links to events, news and resources):

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/practice-areas/kinship-care>

Benefits, Housing and Financial Advice

UK Government benefits calculator

<http://gov.uk/benefits-calculators>

Citizen's Advice (confidential, impartial and independent advice)

<http://citizensadvice.org.uk/>

EntitledTo (benefits calculator to check means-tested benefits entitlements)

<http://entitledto.co.uk/>

Family Action (practical, emotional and financial support for families)

<http://family-action.org.uk/>

Turn2us (information and practical support for people with financial struggles)

<http://turn2us.org.uk/>

Shelter (Advice and support services offering one-to-one help with housing issues and homelessness)

<https://england.shelter.org.uk/>

Identity and Cultural Needs

Families in Harmony (offers kinship care peer support for families of African, Caribbean and Mixed Heritage)

<https://familiesinharmony.org.uk/>

Kinship free training on 'Raising children with diverse ethnic heritage and cultural identity:'

<https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/training-and-events/workshops/raising-diverse-children-20260428/>

Supplementary Education (community-led organisations complementing mainstream education and youth services by tailoring support and resources to individual communities)

<https://supplementaryeducation.org.uk/supplementary-education-the-nrc/>

Kinship Local Offer

Kinship local offer (information on what a local offer is and what Local Authorities may provide)

<https://kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/advice-and-information/what-local-authorities-should-offer-kinship-carers/#kinship-local-offer>

Legal Advice and Information

Cafcass, the Children and Family Court

Advisory and Support Service (a non-departmental government body who advise family courts on the best interests of children)

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/>

Coram Children's Legal Centre (helpline for legal advice and information on child, family and education law as well as resources)

<http://childlawadvice.org.uk/>

Family Rights Group (Free, confidential advice to families working with children's services)

<http://frg.org.uk/>

Statutory guidance for local authorities for kinship care (sets out the support kinship families should be provided from their local authority)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/670d3ed5e84ae1fd8592f2fa/Kinship_Care_-_statutory_guidance_for_local_authorities__October_2024.pdf

Support Through Court (UK legal charity that supports people who have to represent themselves in court)

<https://supportthroughcourt.org/>

School

National Network of Parent Carer Forums

(independent national network of parent carer forums for children with special educational needs – also have local groups)

<http://nnpcf.org.uk/>

Special Educational Needs Information

Advice and Support (SENDIAS) (information, advice and support for the families of children and young people SEND)

<http://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/>

Please provide feedback on this guidance

We really welcome your feedback on this guidance. You can share your views by completing the anonymous survey using the links below. Your comments will help us improve the guidance, and we will review feedback and make updates periodically. Thank you.

<https://forms.office.com/e/ULUVZv3tas>



About the Department of Health and Community Sciences, University of Exeter

The Department of Health & Community Sciences at the University of Exeter undertakes applied health and social care research that reflects the needs and priorities of service users and providers. We have a strong commitment to addressing health and social care inequalities and reducing disparities in health and social care outcomes at local, national and international levels. We involve people, communities and organisations in all of our work.

Find out more: <https://medicine.exeter.ac.uk/health-community/>

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. We are made by and for our community of kinship carers. For too long they have been isolated without the help they need. Our purpose is to change lives and change the system. We support, advise and inform kinship carers. Connecting them so they feel empowered. Because a child needs the love and warmth of a thriving family. We develop research, campaigns and policy solutions. Creating positive change across society. Because for kinship families, love alone is not enough. And as we see momentum building for change, we keep working with our community and making impact. Join us. Together, let's commit to change for kinship families.

Find out more: www.kinship.org.uk

About Families in Harmony

Families in Harmony was born out of the kinship care lived experience of Johanna Bernard and Sharon McPherson. We know first-hand that the system is not always culturally competent, often leaving families like ours unseen and unsupported. In just a short time, we are proud to have established ourselves as a trusted, credible voice for African and Caribbean heritage kinship families. Our mission is to ensure that every kinship family with African and Caribbean heritage children are seen, heard and respected - receiving the right support at the right time.

If you are interested in learning more about Families In Harmony's work email: research@familiesinharmony.org.uk or peersupport@familiesinharmony.org.uk

About CoramBAAF

CoramBAAF is the UK's leading membership organisation for professionals working across adoption, fostering and kinship care. We provide information, best practice guidance, advice, training and resources to support our members and influence policy to improve outcomes for children and young people. CoramBAAF's practice forums provide our members with a unique opportunity to discuss professional practice and share knowledge and expertise with colleagues.

Find out more: [Kinship Care Practice Forum](#) and [Private Fostering Practice Forum](#).