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

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Making a Support Plan

A Kinship Care Companion

April 2026

**Guidance for
Professionals**



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

This guidance was made with the dedicated support of the project's Kinship Carer Network – a group of kinship carers from across the country, with different legal statuses and family circumstances, who met regularly throughout this research project. We would like to thank Angela Harper, Caroline Thomas, Cavelle Burris, Debbie Harris, Elaine Duffy, Emily Gomez, Matt Stephens, Michelle Stephens, Jackie Cartwright, Janice Santos, and Keith Whittaker from the project's Kinship Carer Network for the time, energy, and ideas they shared. Together, we developed this guidance to support kinship families to access better, more meaningful support plans. The Kinship Carer Network would like to share this message:

"As kinship carers, we have spent many hours putting this document together because our own experience has been very difficult. We do not want others to go through the same - we hope this document helps bring about positive change in line with the unique needs of each family."

The project team would also like to thank everyone who took part in the research for generously giving their time and sharing their views and experiences, and the peer researchers who assisted in study recruitment and data collection. We are also grateful to Lucy Peake and Tim Fisher at Kinship; Ann Horne and Clare Seth at CoramBAAF; Sharon McPherson at Families in Harmony and Nancy Meehan and Gemma Abrey at Torbay Council for their advice and support throughout.

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Introduction

Every day, relatives and friends step in to give children a loving home when their parents are unable to care for them. These kinship carers change children's lives for the better. Yet too often kinship families are not getting the consistent support they need.

A clear support plan is an important foundation for kinship care. Where a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is being made, there is a statutory expectation that support arrangements are set out. For kinship foster carers, a specific support plan is not required in the same way but developing one remains good practice. In reality, support planning benefits all kinship carers by setting out agreed support and responsibilities in writing, giving carers confidence they and their child's needs will be met, and helping prevent challenges and pressures from escalating over time. Despite this, support plans for kinship carers are often overlooked, rushed, or too generic to really meet a family's needs.

This guide aims to change that by helping professionals and kinship carers create support plans that truly reflect each family's circumstances.

Although this guide is grounded in research and co-production with kinship carers and focuses on supporting conversations with them, children and young people's voices should always be listened to and included in support planning wherever appropriate and possible.

Kinship families will also 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 recognise these realities and ensure support is fair, culturally responsive, and actively addresses barriers linked to race, faith, ethnicity, and heritage.

What Kinship Carers Tell Us Works Well in Support Planning

Being clear and upfront from the start

- Be open from the start about the challenges and sacrifices that come with being a kinship carer
- Information being shared openly, in clear and accessible language

Working together for the child

- A shared focus on the child's safety and wellbeing as top priority
- Feeling that carers' voices, alongside those of other key family members, are listened to and respected
- Children's thoughts, wishes, and feelings being heard and taken seriously

Allowing time for meaningful planning

- Support planning that is not rushed and allows space for discussion
- Plans are developed away from last-minute decisions or high-pressure situations
- Time for carers to review, discuss, and shape the support plan, including seeking legal advice without fear that raising concerns could jeopardise the kinship arrangement

Building on strengths

- A focus on strengths and solutions, not only problems or difficulties
- Encouraging kinship carers to connect with and support one another

Planning for the future

- Support planning that looks beyond the child's current circumstances to anticipate how needs, pressures, and relationships may change over time
- Don't wait for crises to occur; proactively discuss and plan for difficulties

Revisiting and updating

- Agree clear times to review the support plan at regular intervals
- Treat the plan as a living document that adapts as children grow and family circumstances change and being proactive in reminding carers the plan can be reviewed
- Acknowledge what support has been delivered and address what still needs attention

Making support sustainable

- Keep commitments realistic and achievable with the resources available
- Be transparent about service availability, waiting lists, and access criteria

Setting clear roles and accountabilities

- Make responsibilities clear so that professionals, carers, family members and services each know exactly what they are expected to do
- Follow up on actions so promises don't drift

Create trust and reduce stigma

- Approach planning with empathy
- Help carers feel the planning process is supportive and encouraging – not a form of assessment or intrusive checking-up.

How this guide was made

This resource has been **co-produced with kinship carers and professionals and is evidence-informed**, drawing on research from the ['Understanding kinship carer networks to inform targeted support'](#) project, which ran from April 2024 to March 2026. This project, led by Exeter University, explored the support networks kinship carers rely on and captured the experiences of carers from a wide range of legal statuses, backgrounds, and circumstances to better understand what they need when raising a child in kinship care. We also worked closely with local authorities and the organisations Kinship and Coram BAAF to ensure the guide is practical and focused on what works.

Why support plans are important

- **Help families feel confident and supported** - so carers feel valued and reassured in their role.
- **Secure support early** - addressing needs early helps prevent difficulties from escalating and reduces the levels of anxiety and stress that families experience.
- **Ensure children's needs are met over time** - recognising that children's needs change as they grow and develop.
- **Maintain carer wellbeing** - helping carers stay healthy, maintain balance, and enjoy family life so they can focus on the needs of the child and family
- **Provide accountability** - giving carers and professionals a shared record they can use to advocate for support.
- **Build trust** - supporting open and reliable communication between carers and professionals

How to use this guide

The guide sets out key areas that should be considered when developing a support plan. It can be used during **assessments**, **planning meetings**, and **reviews** to ensure that support planning is consistent and that no key areas are overlooked. It is good practice that support planning begins early and continues over time, so it is experienced as an ongoing conversation rather than a final step. Professionals need a clear understanding of the local offer to identify and signpost appropriate support.

This guide has been designed to be used as a structured support planning tool, using questions and prompts to guide conversations about circumstances and needs, and to encourage clear recording of agreed needs and actions in the support plan. The final section includes a simple checklist of the essential elements every kinship support plan should contain.

This resource forms part of a wider suite of guidance, which includes:

- [A companion guide for kinship carers](#) – supporting carers to prepare for support planning, reflect on their circumstances and their child's needs, and confidently request appropriate support.
- [Making a support plan: detailed guidance](#) – a longer resource that draws on research findings and kinship carer lived experience to inform policy, practice, and service development at a national level.

Checklist and key questions for support planning



1. Understanding the Child's Needs

Sharing information with carers

- What information about the child's experiences and needs is currently available?**
Record what is known, what remains unclear, and what information may become available later, with an emphasis on potential risks to the child or family.
- Are there any limits on information sharing?**
If information cannot be shared with the carer for legal or safeguarding reasons, record what can be explained now, why restrictions are in place, and how information will be shared once restrictions are lifted.

Relationship-building

- What was the child's relationship with the kinship carer before the kinship care arrangement, and how does this influence any adjustments needed?**
Discuss whether there was an existing relationship and how strong it was. Record what support may be needed to help build or strengthen this relationship.
- How will introductions, transitions and early relationship-building be supported?**
Where possible, plan gradual introductions (e.g. overnight stays or shared activities); where arrangements are sudden, consider how protected time can support the carer and child to get to know each other.
- How are the wider family adjusting, and what support may help everyone settle?**
Consider the impact on all household members and how the child, kinship carer, and wider family could be supported to adjust to the kinship arrangement.

Emotional and behavioural needs

- How are the child's past experiences understood and reflected in planning?**
Discuss and record how experiences such as trauma, loss, or separation may influence the child's emotions, behaviour, and relationships.
- What emotional or behavioural needs may arise in the future?**
Move beyond the child's current situation to consider how emotional and behavioural needs may change over time and what support may be required as the child grows.
- What emotional, therapeutic, or specialist support is in place or may be needed?**
Record any support the child or kinship carer is currently receiving (e.g. counselling, play therapy, family support, mentoring). Where concerns suggest a need for assessment or referral, record what action has been agreed, who is responsible, expected timescales, and any interim support while waiting.

Education and learning

- What information has been shared with the nursery or school, and are there any current concerns?**
Record what the setting knows about the child's needs and experiences, including any issues such as attendance, exclusion, or bullying.
- Are any education-related assessments or plans in progress, or might one be needed?**
If an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or other assessment is underway, record who is leading it, expected timescales, and how the kinship carer will be kept informed, along with any interim support in place.
- What education support is in place, and how well is it meeting the child's needs?**
Record any existing support (e.g. pastoral input, small-group teaching, or mentoring), what is working well, and whether any changes or additions may be needed, particularly at points of review. Also provide information about the Virtual School.
- Have we discussed how the child's race or ethnicity may impact exclusions, SEND identification, or behaviour management?**
Consider whether the child's needs or behaviours might be being interpreted differently, how the school are responding, and what support or adjustments could prevent difficulties escalating.
- Have we discussed support if the child experiences unfair treatment, bias, or discrimination at school?**
Record how any concerns would be raised, how the kinship carer would be supported to advocate for the child, and if needed, what escalation routes or specialist advice would be available.

Culture, identity, and belonging

- How are the child's or young person's views about their identity being heard and reflected in the support plan?**
Record how the child or young person will be involved in conversations about what matters most to them in terms of their heritage, culture, faith, and identity.
- How will family, community, and cultural connections be supported?**
Consider how the child can maintain safe and appropriate links with family, community, culture, or faith, including opportunities for cultural learning and belonging (e.g. community events, places of worship, supplementary schools, or everyday activities such as food, routines, or celebrations).
- If the child has a different racial or cultural background to their carer, what training or guidance can be offered?**
Consider what support may help the carer understand and support the child's racial or cultural identity, including guidance on everyday care and conversations about identity.
- Have we talked about how racial bias or discrimination may affect the kinship child, and what support could help them navigate this over time?**
Consider what training or guidance may support carer to talk about experiences of bias or discrimination, and what role professionals, schools, or community networks may play if concerns arise.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST

Does the plan include:

- The child's health, emotional and developmental needs
- Education, learning needs, friendships, and any support in place at nursery or school
- Identity and cultural needs including whether any discrimination or stigma may impact their experiences or behaviour
- What helps the child settle, feel safe, and develop secure relationships
- Any support required for trauma, loss, separation, or significant change, including culturally appropriate support if needed

2. Supporting the Kinship Carer

Emotional and physical wellbeing

- What emotional or physical wellbeing needs does the kinship carer have, and what support is available?
Discuss any emotional, therapeutic, or practical support the carer may need, including support to manage stress, health conditions, or the impact of loss, change, or shifts in family dynamics.
- Have we talked about whether the kinship carer experiences barriers or discrimination when accessing services, and what support is available if this happens?
Consider how concerns could be raised, what practical or advocacy support may be offered, and how this will be followed up if issues arise.
- Where it would be helpful, are there peer support groups or opportunities that reflect the carer's cultural or racial background?
Consider how carers can be supported to access peer networks that feel inclusive and supportive of their identity and experiences.

Guidance, training, and preparation

- Could access to independent legal advice be helpful at this stage?
Discuss whether legal advice may support the kinship carer to understand legal arrangements or the wording and implications of their support plan.
- What guidance, training, or preparation will support the kinship carer in their role?
Agree what information, training, or resources will be provided to help the carer understand the child's background and development and support them day to day.

Maintaining balance, connections, and time for self

- How will the kinship carer be supported to maintain balance, social connections, and time for themselves?
Consider how the carer can stay connected to friends, family, work, interests, or hobbies, and record any practical support or flexibility needed to help make this possible.

Breaks and respite

- What breaks or respite are needed, and how often might these be helpful?**
Discuss what opportunities might be available or could be put in place, recognising that needs may change over time.
- How will the child's wishes and feelings be included in planning breaks or respite?**
Discuss who the child feels comfortable spending time with, who they would enjoy visiting or staying with away from home, and how these preferences will be reflected in any arrangements.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST



Does the plan include:

- Support for the carer's emotional, identity and physical wellbeing
- Any training, preparation, guidance, or legal advice to be provided
- Access to peer support, mentoring, or respite (formal or informal)
- Tailored information and advice relevant to the carer's legal status and circumstances

3. Financial, Housing and Practical Support

- How has becoming a kinship carer affected the family's finances?**
Discuss any new costs, changes to income, work, or savings, and how these pressures may affect family stability.
- What financial advice or support is available, and how will this be accessed?**
Record how the kinship carer will be supported to access relevant financial help (e.g. benefits advice, tax), and confirm that local financial support policies, eligibility, and any agreed advocacy have been explained.
- What finances are available for legal advice?**
Explain what legal advice is covered by the local authority now but also if the legal order is challenged in the future by the birth parents. Explain the practical process for legal advice being paid for and any circumstances where the family may need to contribute or pay in full.
- Does the current home meet the child's needs, and what housing support may be required?**
Consider whether the carer's housing provides sufficient space, safety, and stability, and record any housing advice, adaptations, or referrals needed and who is responsible for this with any restrictions such as if they sell the home in the future.
- If relevant, has the kinship carer's immigration or residency status been considered?**
Discuss whether the kinship carer's immigration or residency status may affect their access to services, benefits, housing, or employment. Record what advice, advocacy, or specialist support may be needed.

- What practical assistance could help support day-to-day family life?**
Consider what practical support could reduce pressure and support stability, such as transport, childcare, help with routines, furniture, equipment or adaptations, or digital access.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST



Does the plan include:

- Any financial support to be provided, including type, amount, duration, and review arrangements
- Access to welfare benefits advice or financial guidance
- Any housing support required to address space, safety, or stability
- Practical assistance such as transport, childcare, or household adaptations where needed

4. Family Relationships and Contact

- What contact arrangements are in place, and how are they working for the child and the kinship carer?**
Consider how the child and carer are experiencing contact, whether the child is maintaining relationships with everyone who is important to them, and any difficulties that may need support or adjustments (e.g. supervision, or suitable venues).
- What support is available if contact or wider family relationships become difficult or contested?**
Consider potential disputes, conflict, or strain within the wider family, and record how the kinship carer will be supported if concerns arise, including a named professional who can respond promptly.
- What mediation, or practical support could help manage family relationships or conflict?**
Record any mediation, facilitated conversations, or support with communicating difficult information, setting boundaries, or reducing conflict among wider family.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST



Does the plan include:

- Contact arrangements with parents and other people important to the child, including frequency, format, and location
- What support or mediation is available to help establish or manage contact
- How the child's wishes and feelings are understood, recorded, and kept under review

5. Support Networks

- What support network does the kinship carer already have?**
Who can the carer currently rely on, such as friends, family members, neighbours, or other trusted adults, and how involved they are in everyday life.
- Who can step in to help at a times of crisis?**
Agree who the carer can contact if a situation becomes overwhelming or a child is in crisis.
- Where support networks are limited, how can connections be strengthened?**
If the carer feels isolated or has limited informal support, identify opportunities to build connections, including links to local charities, peer groups, or community-based services.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST



Does the plan include:

- The kinship carer's existing support network (family, friends, community)
- Who can provide practical help or emotional support
- Links to peer groups, voluntary organisations, or community networks
- Contingency planning if support networks change, reduce, or become unavailable
- How the carer will be supported to maintain social connections and reduce isolation

6. Review and Accountability

- When will the support plan be reviewed?**
Agree clear review points (e.g. after 6 months or annually) to check what is working and where additional support may be needed, taking account of key transitions for the child or young person (for example starting a new school).
- How can the kinship carer request an earlier review?**
Ensure the plan sets out who to contact if circumstances change and the support plan needs to be reviewed sooner.
- Has the kinship carer been provided a clear and accessible copy of the support plan and enough time to comment?**
Ensure the kinship carer has had the opportunity to see and comment on the care plan with enough time to do so. Also confirm the plan has been shared in a format and language the carer can use and understand. Do they know how to refer to it and use it to guide future conversations and reviews.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST



Does the plan include:

- When the support plan will be reviewed (e.g. 6 months or annually)
- Who is responsible for coordinating reviews and monitoring delivery
- Consideration of the family's faith, racial, cultural, and community needs
- Who the carer should contact if agreed support is delayed or not delivered
- Confirmation that the kinship carer has been provided with a copy of the support plan in clear, accessible language and understands how to use it

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](#).