



Kinship care leave

Briefing for Westminster Hall debate relating to support for new adoptive parents (e-petition 601323), led by Elliot Colburn MP

- This debate considers an e-petition which calls for self-employed adoptive parents to be eligible for statutory adoption pay in the same way that maternity allowance is available for self-employed new birth mothers. However – unlike adopters – kinship carers aren't eligible for any kind of statutory paid or unpaid leave.
- More children have left the care system on a Special Guardianship Order than via adoption for three consecutive years yet there is a significant lack of parity in support available to kinship carers with adopters. They are typically invisible in policy discussion about adoption and care.
- The lack of paid leave for kinship carers exacerbates the existing financial insecurity they face. We believe that all kinship carers should be entitled to statutory paid leave on a par with adoption leave so they can be present whilst their children settle into their new home and so carers and their families are not forced to give up work and fall into poverty.

What is kinship care?

Kinship care is when a child lives with a relative or friend who isn't their parent, usually because their parents aren't able to care for them. There are over 200,000 children in kinship care across England and Wales being brought up by grandparents as well as older siblings, aunties, uncles, family friends and neighbours.

Kinship care keeps children connected to their family network and important people in their lives. Research shows that children in kinship care have more stable experiences and positive outcomes than those in local authority care. Unlike adoption, kinship care options preserve a legal connection to a child's birth parents and offer a route to permanence within their extended family network. This supports young people's continued development of healthy relationships and a sense of belonging and identity, but often comes at significant personal and financial cost for carers who step up to raise children with little support.

Children in kinship care may be living in an informal arrangement agreed by their parents, on a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order, or 'looked after' by the local authority and placed with kinship foster carers. This complex picture means carers often face a legal and postcode lottery determining the support they can receive.

Key issues

Kinship carers face significant financial hardship when they step up to care for children.

Kinship care often results from crisis. Unlike adopters or foster carers who receive at least some preparatory support and training, 53% of kinship carers take on children with very little notice or preparation and have to manage a total change in their circumstances, often overnight.ⁱ

Many kinship carers face financial hardship due to the necessity of giving up work or living off a pension, while also having to take on full financial responsibility for the child. Kinship's 2021 Financial Allowances survey highlighted that 82% of kinship carers had worried about their financial situation in the past year.ⁱⁱ This is of particular concern as kinship families are more likely to be financially vulnerable and on a lower income - 40%

of children in kinship care live in the poorest 20% of households and 76% of children in kinship care live in a deprived household.ⁱⁱⁱ Kinship carers are also more likely to be older, in poorer health, insecurely housed, socially isolated, and living in poverty than any other parenting group.

Kinship carers have no statutory entitlement to paid or unpaid leave, exacerbating financial difficulties and often pushing them out of employment and into poverty.

Kinship's 2017 Annual Survey showed that 85% of kinship carers were of working age and 73% were working prior to becoming a kinship carer. 45% of carers gave up work and 23% reduced their hours. 81% of those who gave up work said they did so to meet the needs of the children. 40% of carers were reliant on welfare payments as their main source of income and 50% were using their life savings to help raise the children.^{iv} The Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care also highlighted that more than one in two kinship carers have to give up work or reduce their hours.^v

"The biggest challenge I faced when I took in my kinship children was financial. I had to take unpaid parental leave and I wasn't entitled to benefits as the children's parents were still claiming them. I had lost my salary and I had no money coming in. We were a family of three that became a family of six..... I even lost out on a promotion as the local authority advised I stayed home to make sure the children were settled."

Aunt and kinship carer supported by Kinship.

Surveys delivered by Kinship between 2012^{vi} and 2021^{vii} suggest that fewer carers are now in employment, at a time when the retirement age for women (who make up the vast majority of kinship carers) has continued to rise. A lack of paid time off work is forcing them out of the labour market early to rely on the benefits system now and into their old age.

The case for statutory paid leave for kinship carers

Kinship carers should have a statutory right to kinship care leave that is comparable to adoption leave. This should be offered to all kinship carers regardless of the child's legal order or journey into kinship care.

It is better for carers, for their children and for the economy, that employment opportunities remain open following the change in family circumstances. Currently, the lack of statutory entitlement to paid leave from employment exacerbates carers' already disadvantaged socioeconomic position, plunging more families into poverty with significant detrimental impacts for children's life chances.

This is critical for children's experiences and outcomes; research demonstrates that children need carers to be present whilst they settle in to build relationships and create stability. If kinship carers and the children they care for continue to be failed, fewer children will be able to grow up in kinship care, forcing more into the care system where they are more likely to face poorer experiences and outcomes. This also comes at much greater financial cost; Kinship's economic case for kinship care demonstrates that every 1000 children taken out of the care system could free up £40 million worth of resources to support kinship care^{viii}.

"My employers were really supportive, but all they could offer me was a year unpaid (leave)."

Kinship carer, anonymous.

Entitlement to paid leave is one of the most important ways to ensure kinship carers have the financial support they need, alongside the introduction of financial allowances for all kinship carers on a par with the minimum fostering allowance, and broader measures which provide practical and emotional support for kinship carers and their families.^{ix}

There is a significant disparity in the support offered to kinship carers when compared to adopters and foster carers, despite caring for children with very similar needs and experiences and despite the fact that more children have left the care system on a Special Guardianship Order than via adoption for three consecutive years^x. Most children and young people in kinship care have experienced similar adversities to children who have experience of local authority care; 66% of children in all forms of kinship care have experienced abuse and/or neglect.^{xi}

Suggested questions

MPs should use the debate to raise awareness of the disparity in support for kinship families and call for the Government to consider introducing statutory paid kinship care leave.

- What assessment has the Government made of introducing statutory paid kinship care leave for all kinship carers on a par with adoption leave?
- What plans does the Government have to improve the support offered to kinship carers to recognise the commitment they make to children who cannot live with their parents?

About Kinship

Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We offer kinship carers financial, legal, practical, and emotional support and understanding from the moment they need it, for as long as they need it. Our expert advice, information, and guidance help with complicated and stressful decisions that so many kinship families must make. We are always there to support them through difficult times and celebrate the good.

Kinship carers are strong and determined. Together, they are powerful. We help them build communities of support and action by connecting families locally and across England and Wales. We are at the heart of kinship networks, partnering with and influencing service providers, local and national government, and other organisations. We communicate directly with 8,000 kinship carers and 1,000 kinship care professionals. In 2020-21, our advice service advised 3,500 kinship carers. In 2022 we are rolling out a new national peer support service, funded by the Department for Education, which will support kinship carers in every local authority in England.

For more information or to arrange a meeting, please contact Sam Turner, Communications and External Affairs Manager at sam.turner@kinship.org.uk or on 07399 154170.

ⁱ <https://kinship.org.uk/report/state-of-the-nation-2019-survey-report/>

ⁱⁱ <https://kinship.org.uk/financial-survey/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/sps/documents/kinship/Kinstat_%20Briefing%20Paper%20001_V2.pdf

^{iv} <https://kinship.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Grandparents Plus State of the Nation Survey 2017.pdf>

^v <https://frg.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/the-cross-party-parliamentary-taskforce-on-kinship-care/>

^{vi} <https://kinship.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Giving-up-the-day-job-June-2012.pdf>

^{vii} <https://kinship.org.uk/kinship-annual-survey-2021/>

^{viii} <https://kinship.org.uk/news/the-economic-case-for-kinship-care/>

^{ix} <https://kinship.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Kinship-care-briefing-Feb-22.pdf>

^x <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2021>

^{xi} <https://kinship.org.uk/kinship-annual-survey-2021/>