

#ValueOurLove

toolkit for engaging MPs



Keep children within their families.

Support kinship carers.

Your guide to campaigning for change with your MP in England



About this toolkit

This toolkit will **support you** to campaign for positive change for kinship families.

It will give you the tools to **influence your MP to support #ValueOurLove** and help secure national change for families like yours across England.



What's included:

- What is the #ValueOurLove campaign?
- Why should I engage with my MP?
- How do I influence my MP?
- What should I ask my MP to do?
- How do I reach them and what do I say?



What is the #ValueOurLove campaign?

Kinship's **#ValueOurLove** campaign is calling on the Government to value the love of kinship carers and **take urgent action to improve support available for kinship families.**

The Government has recently made a number of commitments to kinship families including providing new training for kinship carers and a dedicated **Kinship Care Strategy due to be published** by the end of 2023. We need this strategy to deliver transformative change for kinship families that is long overdue.

It must:

①

Equalise financial allowances between foster and kinship families.

②

Equalise access to training and support between kinship carers and foster carers.

③

Equalise leave between adoptive and kinship families.

④

Equalise support between children in kinship care and those in care.

162,000 children in kinship families across England and Wales know the value of love.

Love means commitment to children, being there for them and supporting them as long as they need it. And love provides the best value to children, society, and the economy – the love and sacrifice of kinship carers saves the public purse millions a year by preventing children from going into the care system.

But the love kinship carers have for the children they look after isn't being valued in the way that it should be. **Together, we can change that.**

Why should I engage with my Member of Parliament (MP)?

#ValueOurLove has already achieved some **major campaign wins** – in particular, increased training for kinship carers and the new Government commitment to developing a Kinship Care Strategy.

Done right, this new **Kinship Care Strategy** could be a real turning point for kinship families and take us a big step closer to securing the support they so urgently need. **We can only get there by using all the tools we have to influence those in power – starting with MPs.**

Your MP is there to represent your views in Parliament. It is their job to listen to you and raise your concerns. They are one of the highest profile and most influential people that every single person has access to. As such, they can be a powerful lever for change. Kinship families need change on a national scale.

MPs can also help with "**casework**" - where individuals in their constituency go to them with **personal problems that MPs can help to solve**. This is a very important part of an MP's workload but it's different to campaigning for change for all kinship carers which is what we're focusing on in this toolkit.

Now is the perfect time to continue to raise awareness around the issues that kinship families face and ensure that kinship care stays on your MP's radar and the political agenda.

MPs are used to hearing from campaigners on all kinds of issues and we know that campaigning by sharing your story really works. **Sharing your personal experience** of where current policies and practices fall short can play a big role in improving things for all kinship families. **Your experience is a powerful tool.**

Who is my MP?



You can find out who your MP & their contact details on the Parliament website:
www.members.parliament.uk/members/commons

How do I influence my MP?



Get in touch:

The best way to get in touch with your MP is by email.

In your email you should:

Be personal – your experience is the most important part of engaging with your MP so you can talk about what matters most to you.

Remember! You can use the four **#ValueOurLove campaign calls** above to help structure your email if that helps.

Be clear and concise – keep it short and sweet. Open with a line about who you are (it can be good to remind them that you are a constituent and a kinship carer!) and why you are contacting them. Then a few sentences about what you are asking for and why.

There will be times when we ask you to send an email to your MP and give you a template email with exactly what to say. These are important at specific campaign moments. But to build an individual, personal relationship with your MP, **it's best if this email isn't copy and pasted** – it should sound like it's coming from an individual person.

You must include your **full name** and **address** in your email.

If you have an **existing relationship with your MP** - e.g. if you sent them an email when you joined the #ValueOurLove campaign or you've **been in touch about case work or another campaign issue** before – it can be good to follow up referencing the contact you've had with them already.

How do I influence my MP?

Arrange a meeting:

The **single most impactful thing you can do to engage your MP** on the issue of kinship care is to arrange a face-to-face meeting. Meeting with your MP may be the difference between them backing the campaign and supporting our calls for change or just adding it to their already very long 'to-do' list.

MPs hold surgeries – meetings with their constituents – every week, usually on a Friday and you usually need to arrange a meeting time in advance. This will happen in your constituency, so you won't need to travel to Westminster to meet your MP. If you aren't able to meet your MP in person, many will also be happy to arrange a video call. The meeting will be no more than **20 minutes long** (and could be shorter!).

In your meeting you can:



Share your personal experience of kinship care.

What challenges have you faced? How has the current system made things harder? How would you like to see it changed? You can also talk about the joys of being a kinship carer and any positive experiences that you wouldn't have had otherwise.

- It can be good to **focus on one or two of the things** that have been most challenging in your kinship journey rather than trying to cover everything.
- If you're not personally a kinship carer, remember to explain to your MP **why this is an issue that's so close to your heart**.
- We know it can be hard to share your experiences sometimes. **It's ok to be emotional** – just remember you don't have to share anything you're not comfortable with. Your experience is more powerful than anything we at Kinship could write to make the case for your – that's why this is so important.

How do I influence my MP cont.

Arrange a meeting:



Once you have a meeting arranged, remember to **tell the Campaigns Team** at Kinship so we can help you prepare if you need.



Share key information.

e.g., There are **twice the number of children in kinship care** as foster care, or that most kinship carers receive little or no financial support from the Government.

- You can also find some local statistics about the numbers of children in kinship care in your constituency in our **Kinship Map**: <https://valueourlove.kinship.org.uk/map>



Talk about the benefits of kinship care for children when kinship carers are supported to help their families thrive.

Children who grow up in kinship care often start in the same position as children who grow up in foster care. But when kinship carers have the support they need, **kinship children can do better in life including in education and employment.** The love they receive in kinship families gives children confidence, self-esteem, and happiness. But kinship children can only do so well unless their carers have the full breadth of financial, emotional, and practical support.



Talk about **#ValueOurLove**

Tell them about what the **#ValueOurLove campaign has already achieved** and why it's been important to you as a kinship carer.

How do I influence my MP cont.

Arrange a meeting:



Talk about why increased support for kinship care is good for the economy.

Love provides the best value to children, society and the economy - the love and sacrifice of kinship carers saves the public purse millions a year by preventing children from going into the care system. For every 1000 children that are raised in kinship families rather than the care system the **Government saves £40million** and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20million



Leave them with something to read.

If you let us know about your meeting beforehand, we can send over a more detailed briefing for your MP so that they can easily refer back to the issues that you raised and have some more in-depth information. You can also find more detailed information about **our policy and research work here: <https://kinship.org.uk/policy-and-research/>**



Summarise.

In the last couple of minutes, summarise what you have discussed, the general feedback that the MP has given, and ask them to **commit to the below follow up actions** to support the campaign.

So, what should I ask my MP to do?

Your MP can be influential in many ways. There are lots of things you could ask them to do, either in person or by email, but here are **our top three suggestions**:

Publicly champion kinship care and support the **#ValueOurLove** campaign.

MPs have enormous platforms and can be very influential in supporting the campaign. You can ask your MP to tweet in support of our campaign calls for change, include their position on kinship care on their website or write something for your local paper about kinship carers, the challenges they face, and what needs to be done to improve the situation.



Write to relevant Ministers about what kinship carers need.

Ministers are most commonly MPs who belong to the same party as the one in Government and who oversee a particular area of Government policy. Other MPs can help us make the case to the Government by writing to those Ministers about our top policy calls.

- **To equalise support between kinship carers and kinship children** and foster carers and foster children. Ask your MP to write to the Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Keegan MP, and ask her to ensure that the new Kinship Care Strategy brings financial, practical and emotional support in line with what is available to foster and adoptive families.
- **To introduce paid “kinship leave” that works like adoption leave.** Ask your MP to write to the Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business, Kevin Hollinrake MP, and ask him to urgently support the introduction of “kinship leave” on a par with adoption leave.
- If your MP is a Minister but isn't named above, it's even more important that they send these letters as their voice will be particularly influential.

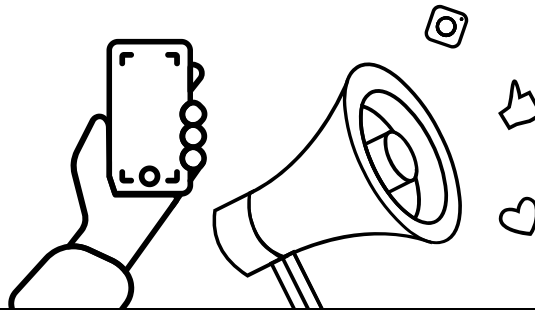
So, what should I ask my MP to do cont?



Attend a local peer support group.

Peer support groups for kinship carers exist across the country as somewhere kinship carers can go to share experiences and feel supported by people in the same situation as them. If you're a member of a local kinship carer support group, ask your MP to attend to hear from multiple people about the range of issues that affect different kinship carers.

Whatever your MP agrees to, **remember to pin down a time frame** – agree when they can attend a meeting (or at least when they will let you know by) or when you can expect to hear about their discussions with their colleagues. **Be clear that you're going to follow up and will be expecting action.**



Remember! Ask if you can post about the meeting on social media. Ask if you can take a photo with your MP and for a quote to go with it. Make your MP aware that Kinship might share it too. If the MP has staff with them, you can ask them to **take a photo or take a selfie!**

After you've met with your MP:

THANK YOU!

Thank your MP for their time.

A day or so after the meeting, send your MP an email thanking them for their time and note some key points that were discussed as well as a summary of what they agreed to do and by when.



Share feedback with Kinship.

We are working hard to make sure every MP in England and Wales knows who we are, your feedback on the meeting and any agreed actions and insight into their thinking helps us in our policy work.

Share your meeting with your networks/post on social media.

Social media posts are a great way to raise awareness and signpost people to Kinship. Please tag us in your posts too (Instagram: @kinship_charity / Twitter: @kinshipcharity / facebook: @kinshipcarecharity).



If you post on social media – share it with Kinship!

We would love to share your post with our followers to encourage other campaigners to meet with their MP. If you would like us to share your post, please email comms@kinship.org.uk.



Follow up.

Hopefully during your meeting, you will have agreed a timeframe for your MP to take action and deliver on their commitment to you. Please follow up and check in around the time that they said they would have actioned their agreed commitment.



Tell Kinship how it went.

We can also help you to decide what you want to do next! You can contact our Campaigns Manager, Sadie, at sadie.kempner@kinship.org.uk.

Our final top tips

1 Remember to be polite, persuasive and personal – your MP hears from lots of campaigners, and you want to stand out for the right reasons!



4 Be persistent! If you don't hear back from your MP within 2 weeks, email them again or call their office to ensure that your email was received.



2 Remember that you are the expert – it's possible your MP won't have heard of kinship care or not know very much about it. Your experience is valuable – be confident sharing what you know, but you don't need to have all the answers.



5 Take notes – you will probably cover a lot of ground in your meeting, and it will be helpful to be able to refer back to what was said. You could even record the audio of the meeting on your phone, but it is always best to ask first if you want to do that.



3 Be specific about what the problem is and what you want them to do about it. Link the issues you're discussing, e.g. kinship leave, to your personal experience, e.g. having to leave your job when your child came to live with you because your employer wouldn't provide paid leave.



6 You might not get the response you want in your first email reply or at your first meeting. It takes time to bring an MP with you – they may need to go on a bit of a journey to really understand the issues around kinship care. Don't be disheartened if it doesn't go the way you want.

