



Department  
for Education

# **Kinship Carers in the workplace: Guidance for Employers**

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# What is Kinship Care

Kinship care<sup>1</sup> (sometimes known as Family and Friends Care) is where a child is being raised in the care<sup>2</sup> of a family friend or family member who is not their parent. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term.

The UK Government is actively working to increase the use of kinship care for children who cannot remain with their birth parents, as this provides considerably better outcomes compared to children in foster and/or residential care<sup>3</sup>.

However, remaining in work can present a challenge for many kinship carers, who often take on responsibility for children at great personal cost and with very little notice. Providing support to help them balance their new caring responsibilities with work can have a significant positive impact on their lives and the lives of the children in their care, but also presents clear benefits for business, including staff retention and motivation.

Every employer and organisation is different, and the flexibility, resources and support that can be offered to kinship carers will vary. This document sets out who kinship carers are and how they can be supported at work. This includes adapting HR policies, signposting to existing workplace entitlements, and creating a culture of support.

There are a range of possible reasons why a child can no longer live with their birth parents, which can often come about in a way that is turbulent and traumatic for the child and families involved. Kinship carers step in to raise children, often preventing them from going into foster or residential care.

Based on the Census data, in 2021, there were around 132,000 children growing up in the care of relatives in England<sup>45</sup>. Children who grow up in kinship care have better outcomes than children who grow up in other types of non-parental care. They are more likely to:

- Stay in this arrangement permanently,
- Have higher levels of employment later in life<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Defined in Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/championing-kinship-care-national-kinship-care-strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/championing-kinship-care-national-kinship-care-strategy)

<sup>2</sup> 'Raised in the care of' – The government definition of kinship care requires a child to be with the carer on an ongoing basis. This may be a short, medium, longer term or permanent arrangement. This can include kinship carers raising children as part of a shared care arrangement.

<sup>3</sup> See references 5 – 8 below

<sup>4</sup> [Kinship care in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-population/families-and-households/kinship-care)

<sup>5</sup> This figure is an estimate of the number of kinship children, including those in households of 6 and more, in England. It does not include children in non-familial kinship care.

<sup>6</sup> [Sacker A 2021 Report The-lifelong-health-and-wellbeing-trajectories-of-people-who-have-been-in-care.pdf \(ucl.ac.uk\)](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/health-research/2021/01/sacker-a-2021-report-the-lifelong-health-and-wellbeing-trajectories-of-people-who-have-been-in-care.pdf)

- Have fewer social and emotional problems
- Have better long-term health compared to children in foster or residential care<sup>7</sup>.  
Remain with their siblings compared to foster care<sup>8</sup>
- To report that they feel loved<sup>9</sup>.

No two kinship care arrangements are the same, and the circumstances in which your employees may become a kinship carer will vary greatly.

## Becoming a kinship Carer

Kinship carers step in and provide a home for children, often in the most difficult of circumstances and at short notice. This is often a sudden change that requires them to balance work alongside settling the child into a new environment and adjusting to a significant change in their lifestyle, their financial situation and their home.

Children in kinship care often have considerable additional emotional and physical needs that require an increased level of care and support<sup>10</sup>, both in the short-term, for example, settling them into their new environment, and in the longer-term. Due to complicated circumstances, some kinship carers may also have little, or no, prior relationship with the child they care for, and will need to take time to establish trust and a bond with them.

Kinship carers may also have to take practical steps associated with taking in a child, such as undertaking quick changes to their home, or getting their kinship child/children into a new school.

Some kinship carers feel they are unable to continue to work due to the pressures of taking in and raising a child, which can be exacerbated by challenges specific to their individual circumstances.

In 2021, 33% of kinship care households contained no employed adults, compared to 13% of parental households, though this is partly explained by the age profile of potential kinship carers.

A 2023 survey<sup>11</sup> based on more than 500 kinship carers also found that, of those who responded to the survey:

- 41% had to leave work permanently

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<sup>7</sup> [Kinship care - What Works for Children's Social Care \(whatworks-csc.org.uk\)](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/kinship-care-what-works-for-childrens-social-care)

<sup>8</sup> [siblings-in-care-final-report-january-2015.pdf \(frg.org.uk\)](https://frg.org.uk/siblings-in-care-final-report-january-2015.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [Kinship Care Leads to Better Outcomes for Children – Chapin Hall](https://www.chapinhall.org/kinship-care-leads-to-better-outcomes-for-children)

<sup>10</sup> [Kinship care - What Works for Children's Social Care \(whatworks-csc.org.uk\)](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/kinship-care-what-works-for-childrens-social-care)

<sup>11</sup> [Forced-Out-June-2023-FINAL.pdf \(kinship.org.uk\)](https://kinship.org.uk/forced-out-june-2023-final.pdf)

- 45% needed to reduce their working hours after they became a kinship carer

Kinship carers, much like parents or adopters, are likely to benefit from additional support and flexibility from their employers to aid them in balancing work with providing the best possible care to kinship children. The type of support that is most appropriate will depend on their individual circumstances, and whether they are dealing with an immediate crisis period, or the long-term pressures of raising a child.

Embracing flexible working presents clear benefits for businesses as well as workers. It can

- attract more talent
- improve staff motivation
- reduce staff turnover – boosting productivity and competitiveness.

CIPD research shows that more than half (51%) of employees say they have flexible working arrangements in their current role. More than a third of organisations (37%) have seen an increase in requests for flexible working and almost two-fifths (38%) say that more home/hybrid working has increased their organisation's productivity/efficiency.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> [An update on flexible and hybrid working practices | CIPD](#)

# Kinship friendly workplace practice

## UK workplace entitlements

Kinship carers are already entitled to access some of the UK's family-friendly workplace entitlements designed to help parents and carers combine work with childcare.

Employers are encouraged to signpost these to kinship carers and give full consideration to any eligible request.

Subject to their ability to meet eligibility and other requirements, employed kinship carers can access:

- **Right to request flexible working:** All employees with 26 weeks' continuous service have the legal right to request a flexible working arrangement, for example a change to the hours, timing and/or location of work.

[Flexible working: Overview - GOV.UK](#)

- **Time off for family and dependents:** This emergency leave provides employees with a right to a reasonable amount of unpaid time off work to deal with an unexpected or sudden emergency involving a child or dependant. This can include dealing with unexpected disruptions in care arrangements. Time off for dependants is available to all employees, regardless of how long they've been employed.

[Time off for family and dependants: Taking time off - GOV.UK](#)

- **Unpaid Parental Leave:** Employees who have been with their employer for more than a year and have (or expect to have) parental responsibility are eligible for 18 weeks' leave for each child to look after their welfare. Unless the employer agrees otherwise, employees can take a maximum of 4 weeks' leave for each child in a year and must take it as whole weeks.

[Unpaid parental leave: Overview - GOV.UK](#)

## How to be a kinship friendly employer

In association with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development<sup>13</sup>, the below provides a guide with recommendations on how – in addition to the statutory policies outlined above – you can make your workplace a kinship-friendly environment.

### Create a culture of support

**Understand what it means to be a kinship carer:** It is helpful to show employees that you understand what it means to be a kinship carer. Some may not identify themselves as kinship carers, but instead use other terms such as ‘family and friends care’ to describe their circumstances. Kinship carers may not think to raise their circumstances with their manager or feel comfortable sharing this personal information with their employer. They may worry about the potential for stigma around their situation and issues within their family and feel overwhelmed when finding themselves in their new caring role with little warning.

**Communicate your policies and embed a culture of support:** Kinship carers could, in the first instance, be encouraged to speak to their manager or HR contact if they would like to discuss the support options available. Together they can explore and agree what is possible and suitable. This may vary depending on whether they are dealing with the immediate impact of their change in situation, or longer-term childcare responsibilities.

Creating a culture of support within an organisation will help kinship carers to feel comfortable in the workplace and able to raise any issues they might be experiencing with managing their work and other responsibilities.

This can be done in various ways, for example providing information through staff induction processes and/or detailing information on the organisation’s intranet or staff message boards.

### Adapt internal HR policies

One way employers may wish to increase the support available is by creating a workplace policy or scheme for kinship carers, or adapting existing policies and schemes to include them in a way that is appropriate for your business.

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<sup>13</sup> Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development - [Guides | CIPD](#)

## Flexible Working

All employees have the right to request a flexible working arrangement. Many employers are embracing flexible working. As it helps individuals fit work alongside other commitments but also helps firms to attract more talent, increase retention and improve workforce diversity.

Flexible working can be a great support to kinship carers struggling to juggle work and caring commitments. Flexible working options could include:

- Remote working
- Hybrid working (a combination of both remote and in-person working)
- Part-time
- Compressed hours
- Term-time only working
- Job share (one job shared between two people)
- Flexi-time

## Leave policies

Kinship carers can, subject to their circumstances and eligibility, be entitled to some of the UK's family-friendly workplace policies.

Many employers already have enhanced offers that go beyond these statutory policies. To make your workplace more kinship-friendly, you could:

- Amend wording of existing policies or occupational leave schemes (eg special leave) to explicitly include kinship carers.
- Consider offering a bespoke occupational leave scheme to kinship carers. This could be a scheme that is equivalent to an entitlement for which they would otherwise be ineligible, for example Statutory Adoption Leave and Pay<sup>14</sup>.
- Implement a 'compassionate leave' policy for employees. This can be paid or unpaid leave.

## Increase the confidence and capability of managers to support kinship carers

To give individuals the opportunity to raise any issues they are experiencing, people managers can promote an open culture for their teams and hold regular one-to-one conversations with team members.

Creating a culture of inclusion is likely to be most successful where senior leaders are engaged and actively supportive of this. If people managers know that they have the

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<sup>14</sup> [Adoption pay and leave: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/adoption-and-fostering)



support of senior leaders, they are likely to feel much more confident and comfortable supporting and empowering employees.

Having a supportive manager will enable kinship carers to feel that they can continue to work while fulfilling their caring responsibilities. This is likely to encourage employees to come forward and let their manager know that they may need some support and flexibility.

However, employers are encouraged to respect the choice of kinship carers to self-identify themselves, understanding that some people may not want to disclose their situation.

## Support Schemes

Kinship care is a brand-new concept to many people. The following schemes can provide helpful further guidance on how to go further in the support and accommodation you provide for kinship carers.

### **Kinship Friendly Employer Scheme (Kinship)**

Kinship has developed a Kinship Friendly Employers scheme to encourage and support organisations across England and Wales. To ensure that any kinship carer employees can access fair, flexible and funded support within a positive workplace culture which understands and respects their needs, the charity has developed a free Kinship Friendly Employer framework and toolkit, which can be accessed via the link below.

[Employers - support colleagues to care for the children they love \(kinship.org.uk\)](https://www.kinship.org.uk/employers-support-colleagues-to-care-for-the-children-they-love)

### **Fostering Friendly Scheme (The Fostering Network)**

Some kinship carers will be a foster carer for the child/children in their care. Your organisation could support these kinship foster carers by joining The Fostering Network's 'Fostering Friendly' scheme, which helps employers to support and recognise the roles of their employees who foster and involves no direct costs.

[Fostering Friendly | The Fostering Network](https://www.fosteringnetwork.org.uk/fostering-friendly)

### **'Happy to Talk Flexible Working' (Working Families)**

To take advantage of the opportunities flexible working holds, employers may wish to utilise Working Families' 'Happy to Talk Flexible Working' logo and strapline in their advertisement of job roles that are suitable for some form of flexible working. Showing clearly that the job being advertised is available to those wanting to work flexibly.

[Are you happy to talk flexible working? - Working Families](https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/are-you-happy-to-talk-flexible-working)



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