

# Working With Kin Caregivers

Kinship care is the full-time care and nurturing of a child by a relative or someone with a significant emotional connection or longstanding relationship with the child, such as a close family friend. When parents cannot safely provide care, and the child must enter out-of-home care, kinship care can reduce trauma and help children maintain family bonds and community connections. Given the unique circumstances, strengths, and challenges of kin caregiving, child welfare casework practice may require a different approach than when working with traditional foster caregivers.

This bulletin for child welfare caseworkers highlights why kinship care is important and how child welfare professionals can best support kin caregivers.

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## BENEFITS OF KINSHIP CARE

When out-of-home care is necessary, kinship care benefits children in many ways:

- **Reduced trauma.** By providing a sense of stability and belonging in an otherwise unsettling time, kinship care can help reduce the trauma that accompanies parental separation. Unlike nonrelative caregivers, kin caregivers often know and have a strong bond with the child. They also may understand the child's history and family experiences. Grandparents, other relative caregivers, and "fictive kin"—close friends holding a family-like bond with a child—are in a unique position to support children and promote resiliency (Generations United, 2017).
- **Preserved family and community connections.** Kin caregivers typically offer ongoing connections with a child's family of origin, extended family, and community—relationships that are essential to the child's well-being. Kinship care increases the likelihood that siblings will live together or sustain ongoing and important relationships (Fuller et al., 2024; Winokur, 2015). Living with kin also can allow children to stay connected to familiar foods, language, and faith traditions.
- **Greater placement stability and permanency.** Research suggests that children in kinship placements experience less placement disruption and fewer moves than children in traditional foster care (Osborne et al., 2021; Winokur et al., 2015).

- **Better mental health.** Studies also suggest that children in kinship care experience fewer behavioral problems and mental health disorders and better well-being outcomes than children in traditional foster care (Washington et al., 2018; Winokur et al., 2015).

## TRENDS IN KINSHIP CARE

In recent years, child welfare agencies have increased their emphasis on and use of kinship care. In 2022, approximately one-third (34 percent) of all children in foster care lived in a relative's home (Children's Bureau, 2023a) compared with one-quarter (25 percent) in 2007 (Children's Bureau, 2009).

The use of kinship care varies among States, with a few having kinship care placement rates under 15 percent, while others have rates of 45 percent and higher (Children's Bureau, 2023b). States have adopted various strategies, including policies that support licensing for kinship homes, require special approval for nonrelative placements (sometimes referred to as a "kin-first firewall"), and increase access to financial support and other services for kin caregivers.

While some children in kinship care are involved with child welfare, most are not. In fact, for every child in a formal kinship care arrangement with a child welfare agency, 19 children are being raised by kin outside the child welfare system (Grandfamilies.org, 2021).

## LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Several Federal child welfare laws and policies promote kinship care and guide related practices:

- The [Supporting America's Children and Families Act](#) (P.L. 118–258) of 2025 amended title IV-B of the Social Security Act and clarifies that kinship care families are eligible under title IV-B for family support services and family reunification services. The law sets aside \$10 million annually (for 2026 through 2029) for [kinship navigator program](#) discretionary grants and amends the definition of a kinship navigator program to include connections to individualized assistance. (Learn more about kinship navigator programs in the section below, [Helping Kin Caregivers Access Services](#).) The law also requires State and Tribal agencies to consult with youth and families with lived child welfare experience and make a report publicly available on how the agency has implemented their suggestions.
- The [Separate Licensing Standards for Relative or Kinship Foster Family Homes Final Rule](#), published in 2023, allows child welfare agencies to adopt licensing or approval standards for relatives or kin that differ from nonrelative foster family homes. It also allows for the use of Federal funding to help cover the costs of foster care for eligible children placed with kin. (See the [map of States and Territories that have adopted separate licensing or approval standards](#) for kinship foster family homes.)
- The [Family First Prevention Services Act](#) (P.L. 115–123), enacted in 2018, broadly aims to keep families together. It allows agencies to use title IV-E funding for [kinship navigator programs](#), substance use and mental health prevention and treatment programs, parenting skills programs, and other services that help keep children with their families. It also requires agencies to update their relative foster care licensing standards.
- The [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act](#) of 2008 (P.L. 110–351) amended title IV-E of the Social Security Act and requires State and Tribal agencies to exercise due diligence in identifying and notifying all adult relatives within 30 days of a child's removal from their home. It also requires child welfare agencies to consider giving preference to an adult relative over a nonrelative caregiver when determining a placement, provided the relative caregiver meets all relevant State child protection standards. The law created a new [title IV-E guardianship assistance program](#) allowing States and Tribes the option to provide guardianship assistance payments for the care of children by relatives who have assumed legal guardianship of eligible children for whom they previously cared for as foster parents.
- The **Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)** outlines requirements for when a child needs to move across State lines for kinship care, including coordination of paperwork, home studies, and background checks between States. (For more information, see the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children's [ICPC resources](#).)

- The [Indian Child Welfare Act](#) of 1978 (P.L. 95–608) requires child welfare agencies to make active efforts to preserve and reunify American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) families. When the removal of AI/AN children from their homes is necessary, agencies must make efforts to keep them connected with their Tribe and culture; this may include placement with relatives or fictive kin. Some AI/AN communities may consider anyone in the child's band, clan, or Tribe to be fictive kin.

To read more about Federal policies related to kinship care, see the Children's Bureau's [Kinship Care webpage](#). For more information on State laws that give preference to relatives when children need out-of-home care, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's [Placement of Children With Relatives](#).

## SEARCHING FOR AND ENGAGING KIN

The first step in placing a child with kin is to identify relatives and other kin. Sometimes, children and families may be able to provide contact information of extended family and friends willing to help. Other times, this information might be harder to find. The following are tips for finding kin compiled from child welfare agencies across the country (Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, 2023):

- Ask children about the supportive people in their lives. (Use prompts like the following: Who do you feel connected to? Who came to your family's last holiday gathering? Who would you call if you were in trouble?)

- Consider the term "kin" broadly to include not only individuals related by blood (e.g., parents, grandparents, adult siblings, aunts, uncles), but also individuals connected by marriage, adoption, Tribe, and other significant relationships (e.g., godparents, long-time friends).
- Use [genograms](#) or other mapping tools to create visuals of family relationships.
- Search social media and other internet sources, as appropriate, to find family members.
- Ask known contacts to identify other kin.
- Adopt a variety of contact methods to reach out to kin and prepare communications carefully to not overwhelm contacts.
- Plan how to maintain connections for children over time, even if a contact cannot serve as a placement resource.

For additional information and examples, refer to the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Kin-Finding Toolkit](#) and resources from the [Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support](#).

### Engaging Fathers

Fathers are an important but often-overlooked resource for kinship care. Even if fathers do not currently live with their children, they may be able to care for them during the child welfare case or suggest other relatives who can help. For more information, see Information Gateway's [Identifying and Engaging Fathers web section](#).

## HELPING KIN UNDERSTAND PLACEMENT AND PERMANENCY OPTIONS

Kin approached by child welfare agencies may not fully understand the variety of options available to them, the child, and the child's parents. Child welfare professionals can help kin understand the following:

- How they can support the child and serve as a kinship placement while the parents address issues affecting whether the child can live in the home safely
- Types of kinship care and other placement options, including nonrelative foster care
- Potential permanency options, including reunification, guardianship, and adoption
- State child welfare processes
- Court processes, including the different types of hearings, court procedures, and the caregiver's role in any court proceedings
- Available supports and services to help meet the caregiver's and child's needs (See [Helping Kin Caregivers Access Services](#) in this publication.)
- How kin can provide ongoing support to the child, even if they are not living with them

To help with the education process, you may want to share Information Gateway factsheets for families, including [Kinship Care and the Child Welfare System](#), along with written materials from your State.

As you review options with a child's kin, discuss factors in their own lives that may affect their decisions. For example, are they willing and able to comply with child welfare agency safety and case plans? What are their

own financial, health, emotional, and other needs, and how would those be affected by caring for the child? How can their existing support systems help them?

The following subsections provide more information on types of kinship care, licensing of kin caregivers, and permanency options.

### TYPES OF KINSHIP CARE

Kinship care arrangements fall into three categories:

1. **Informal kinship care without child welfare involvement.** The vast majority of kinship care arrangements are made by family members without the involvement of child welfare or juvenile court systems (Grandfamilies.org, 2021). They are referred to as "informal," "private," or "State-independent" kinship care. For example, a parent may leave a child with a relative while they receive treatment for a substance use disorder. In informal kinship care, parents retain legal custody of the children and can take them back at any time. Parents also maintain legal authority for all decisions related to their children's medical treatment and education. In some cases, kin may care for children indefinitely and ultimately obtain temporary guardianship or legal custody or choose to adopt.
2. **Voluntary kinship care in which the child welfare agency is involved, but the State or Tribe does not have legal custody.** If the child welfare agency needs to separate the child from their family due to safety concerns, the agency may ask kin to act as caregiver, usually through a safety plan. This care is considered voluntary because

the State or Tribe does not assume legal custody and oversight responsibility. It is sometimes known as "State-mediated kinship care" or "diversion" because it keeps children out of formal foster care, even though a court or agency can arrange it. Depending on the jurisdiction and the circumstances, the parents may retain legal custody or sign over temporary custody—referred to as "temporary guardianship"—to the kin caregivers. When a kin caregiver has temporary guardianship, they usually can make decisions about education and medical matters, although they should include the parents whenever possible.

- 3. Formal kinship care in which a child welfare agency has legal custody and places a child with kin.** This type of arrangement is referred to as "formal," "public," or "State-mandated" kinship care. Although the child lives with kin, the child welfare agency is responsible for making sure the child has family time with their parents, receives necessary health care, and goes to school. Each child has a caseworker who can help them and their kin caregiver navigate various services and supports. Formal kin caregivers must attend regular visits with the caseworker and may have to attend court proceedings. Under formal kinship care, children's caregivers may or may not be fully licensed or certified, depending on the State's laws and policies. In unlicensed arrangements, kin caregivers may not have access to monthly foster care maintenance payments or other supports.

In all types of kinship care, the parents usually retain some rights (e.g., the right to visit or maintain contact with the child) and responsibilities (e.g., child support)

(American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law et al., 2021). Certain requirements and access to supports (e.g., [title IV-E guardianship assistance](#), foster care maintenance coverage) may vary across types and by jurisdiction. Find more detailed information in [Kinship Caregiving Options: Considerations for Caregivers](#) from the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and its partners.

### **LICENSING AND ELIGIBILITY FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

Licensed kinship care most closely resembles nonrelative foster care in its structured involvement with a child welfare agency and access to services and financial supports. Licensed caregivers are required to undergo specified State licensure processes, but the [standards for relatives and other kin](#) may differ from those of nonrelative foster parents. (See the [map to identify States and Territories with separate licensing standards for kin](#).) To expedite the placement of children who enter foster care with kinship foster parents, title IV-E legislation allows States the option of waiving licensing standards not related to safety (e.g., home space requirements, caregiver income standards) for relatives. Some States also allow provisional approval to expedite kinship placement while relatives work to complete the requirements to become licensed or certified as a foster care placement. The licensing process can be complicated, so it is important to guide kin caregivers through it. (For more information on State laws related to licensure, see Information Gateway's [Placement of Children With Relatives](#).)

Licensed kin caregivers, like nonrelative foster parents, receive monthly subsidies to help with expenses. These subsidies vary by location but are often greater than assistance given through [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#) (TANF) (Generations United, 2021). Guardianship assistance, Medicaid coverage, Supplemental Security Income for the child, and other services may also be available to licensed kin. (See the section below on [Financial Support](#).)

Unlicensed kin caregivers usually do not receive the same supports as licensed kin caregivers. However, depending on the State's policies, many informal, voluntary, or unlicensed kinship caregivers can apply for [TANF child-only grants](#) as a form of financial assistance. (For more information, see [Improving Support for Kinship/Grandfamilies: State Strategies for TANF Child-Only Grants and Related Assistance](#) and the "[Supporting Unlicensed Kinship Foster Families](#)" presentation available on the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network website.)

Keep in mind that the licensing status of a relative or kinship foster family home can affect permanency options for a child in foster care and eligibility for benefits. One of the eligibility requirements for the optional [title IV-E kinship guardianship assistance program](#) and [title IV-E adoption assistance](#) is that the relatives have previously cared for the child as foster parents.

### PERMANENCY OPTIONS

In addition to understanding considerations for near-term placement, kin caregivers need information and awareness of long-term permanency options. Child welfare practitioners can help explain the following options and related considerations:

- **Reunification.** Reunification is the preferred goal for most families. It may take time for parents to address the issues that led to their involvement with child welfare, so it is important to discuss plans for reunification early. Help kin work toward and prepare for reunification. For more information, read Information Gateway's [Promoting Reunification as a Kin Caregiver](#).

### Kinship Treatment Foster Care

Treatment foster care (TFC) is a special type of foster care for children with special health-care needs (i.e., children with one or more chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional conditions requiring specialized health and support services). In TFC, a child stays with a caregiver who is trained to manage complex behavior issues and oversee the child's treatment. Kin caregivers can be trained and licensed for TFC, although rules may vary across different programs and States. To learn more, read the Foster Family-Based Treatment Association's [The Kinship Treatment Foster Care Initiative Toolkit](#).

- **Guardianship.** This option allows the transfer for a child's legal and custodial rights to the relative caregiver without a termination of parental rights. Guardianship can still lead to reunification and may be an easier option for some families to agree to rather than having full custody (i.e., adoption). Guardians are eligible for financial support for caregiving needs. To learn more, visit the Children's Bureau [Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance webpage](#), and read Information Gateway's [Kinship Guardianship as a Permanency Option](#).
- **Adoption.** Some kin caregivers may be interested in adopting their relative children, which gives them permanent and complete legal custody of the child. It also means that the child's parents of origin no longer have parental responsibilities or rights. Kin who adopt their relative children from foster care may be eligible for Federal or State adoption assistance payments. For more information on kinship adoption, see the National Council for Adoption's [Kinship Adoption webpage](#).

For State information on adoption and guardianship programs and policies for children in kinship care, see Information Gateway's searchable [Adoption & Guardianship Assistance by State web section](#) and Generations United's [State-specific charts](#).

## PROVIDING SUPPORT TO KIN CAREGIVERS

Kinship families need multiple forms of support to thrive. This section provides guidance on how caseworkers can best support kinship families.

## TAKE AN EMOTIONS-FIRST APPROACH

When a child is placed in out-of-home care, it can be a scary and emotional time for everyone involved. Many kin caregivers are contacted under emergency circumstances, and some may not know the full extent of the family's situation. It is important to remember that kin caregivers are not just caring for a child, they are also coping with their own feelings. They may experience concern for the child, worry for the child's parents, frustration with being involved with child welfare, and anxiety about subsequent changes in their lives.

At the same time, many kin might feel relieved that an intervention is occurring and excited to welcome the child into their home. While the kin caregiving experience can be difficult, it also can be a time for families to share moments of empathy and gratitude, heal past grievances, and work together for the mutual goal of the child's well-being.

When working with kin caregivers, remember to address their emotions, particularly during the first phone call or point of contact. Take time to listen to their concerns. They may need some time to emotionally process the request for help and think about whether they are truly willing and prepared to care for this child. Provide them with a phone number where they can easily reach you and keep the conversation going throughout the case. (For more tips, learn about Rhode Island's approach to working with families and recognizing emotions in the Information Gateway podcast "[Advances in Supporting Kinship Caregivers, Part 1](#)")

## **CONSIDER THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF KINSHIP FAMILIES**

Kin caregivers may have to step into their new roles during unexpected or urgent circumstances. Because they might not have had time to prepare, they may face additional obstacles in caring for the children (e.g., they might not have furniture or clothing ready). It is important to remember the special circumstances kinship families experience and provide them with appropriate supports. The following describe some potential challenges and opportunities.

### **Family Dynamics**

Children and their kin have the advantage of already knowing each other, but this is generally not in the context of a caregiving relationship. It may take time for all parties to get used to the shift in roles. This shift may even contribute to conflict within the family (Koh et al., 2024). Family counseling can help improve these relationships and develop family resilience, supporting the child's and caregiver's mental and physical health (Wu et al., 2023). For more information on navigating emotions and family relationships, watch Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's video "[The Unique Dynamics of Shared/Co-Parenting in Kinship Families.](#)"

### **Financial and Housing Concerns**

Many kin caregivers are grandparents and other older relatives. About half of grandparents responsible for their grandchildren have left the workforce (Anderson et al., 2024), potentially leaving them with little disposable income. Nearly one-fifth of grandparents responsible for their grandchildren were living in poverty

in 2021 (Anderson et al., 2024). Nevertheless, many kinship families do not receive financial support (Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, 2022). In addition, older caregivers may have downsized their living situations and may not have enough room for the children for whom they are suddenly responsible. Some may live in public or private senior housing that does not allow children. They may have to find new living situations under urgent circumstances. Limited financial resources may make this challenge even more daunting. For more information on how to support kinship families' housing needs, see Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Housing Developments for Grandfamilies.](#)

The potential for financial hardship or housing concerns is not limited to grandparents and other older caregivers. The costs and space demands associated with raising a child can make it difficult for kin to support one child or a sibling group who need an out-of-home placement, particularly when kin are faced with little time to prepare (Johnson et al., 2024). Child welfare professionals and kinship navigator programs can help kin understand where financial assistance might be available, eligibility requirements, and application processes.

### **Legal Challenges**

Many kin caregivers do not have legal custody of the child in their care. This can make it difficult for them to engage with the child's health and educational providers and conduct tasks such as registering a child for school or getting the child needed medical care. The lack of legal recognition may also make it harder for them to contest wrongful evictions because of the child's presence or advocate

their need for a larger apartment to public housing authorities (Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, 2022). Without legal recognition, they also might not be eligible for certain government supports and other services (Hansen et al., 2020). Child welfare professionals can support these families by guiding them through their legal options, including finding [legal aid](#). Some States also provide [legal representation](#) to parents or kinship caregivers of a child in foster care funded by title IV-E.

### **Stigma and Social Support**

Some caregivers may face stigma related to the circumstances that led to the kinship care arrangement (e.g., the relative's substance use or incarceration) (Hansen et al., 2020). They may feel embarrassed about having to care for the child, particularly if they are grandparents stepping in for their own adult children, or worry about the safety and well-being of the child's parents. In addition, some caregivers may be socially isolated and reluctant to ask for help. Having social support from other caregivers in similar circumstances can be a valuable source of strength (Hansen et al., 2020). Connect families with support groups, and help them draw support from existing social networks. Find support groups in Generations United's [Intergenerational Program Database](#).

### **Mental and Physical Health Concerns**

Kin caregivers are often older adults, which may predispose them to physical health challenges that make it difficult to care for a child. More than a quarter of grandparents responsible for their grandchildren have some form of disability (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Some studies have found that grandparents who care for grandchildren are at increased risk for certain physical and mental health problems (Hansen et al., 2020). Childrearing, and the stress associated with it, may contribute to poor caregiver health.

In addition, many children in kinship care experience emotional or behavioral health problems. This is a challenge that some kin caregivers may not be equipped to handle and may lead to high levels of stress (Wu et al., 2020).

Some caregivers may benefit from supports designed to decrease stress, improve their knowledge of and attitude toward caregiving, address physical and mental health problems, and provide social support. Such programs also can improve child well-being. Many States operate [National Family Caregiver Support Program](#) grants through the [Area Agency on Aging](#) that assist older adults, including kin caregivers, in gaining access to support groups, respite care, and other services; use the [Eldercare Locator](#) to find resources in specific locations. In addition, explore programs and services reviewed by the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#).

### **Parental Substance Use**

Parental substance use is the most common reason for kinship care arrangements (Koh et al., 2024). Kin caregivers may need guidance on how to partner with relatives with a substance use disorder, including how to support those not ready to begin treatment, and how to talk with children about substance use. Caregivers may be able to support parents and keep them

connected with their children throughout the treatment process. For more information, see Generations United's [Grand Resource: Help for Grandfamilies Impacted by Opioids and Other Substance Use](#) and Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Supporting Kinship/Grandfamilies When Parents Have Substance Use Disorders](#).

### **Remember the Strengths of Kin Caregivers**

Kin caregivers bring many strengths to the table. One of the biggest is their motivation to promote the child's well-being. Many feel a strong sense of responsibility to protect the child and keep them out of nonrelative foster care (Wu et al., 2023). In addition, some find great joy in taking care of a relative they love and with whom they have a significant emotional bond. For some, childrearing can bring a sense of renewed life purpose (Hansen et al., 2020). Caregivers who have raised children before (e.g., grandparents) often have a wealth of experience and parenting skills, which can improve their capacity to provide care for the child. For more information, read Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Kinship/Grandfamilies: Strengths and Challenges](#).

## **HELPING KIN CAREGIVERS ACCESS SERVICES**

A key way to help kin caregivers is to assist them in accessing services. Having access to concrete supports is associated with improved caregiver mental health and family resilience (Wu et al., 2023). Children also have better outcomes when their kinship families receive the supports and services they need (Generations United, 2021). However, kin caregivers might not realize services are available, not understand the requirements, or be reluctant to seek help. Walk families through all their options. Take the time to explain each service and help caregivers understand eligibility requirements and manage any paperwork.

States often have resource manuals or websites for kin caregivers. Search for related [State Guides and Manuals](#) on the Information Gateway website. In addition, Generations United and its partners offer [State factsheets for grandfamilies](#) with information on State and local programs, public benefits, educational assistance, legal options, and State laws.

## Kinship Navigator Programs

Many States have launched evidence-based title IV-E [kinship navigator programs](#) to create a single point of entry to connect kin caregivers with a range of supportive services. (See related program ratings by the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#).) Most of these programs help kin who are raising children in- or outside the child welfare system, but some work only with families with formal kinship care arrangements. The navigator programs partner with other entities, including [211](#) (phone and online referral services), to expand access to services such as the following:

- Financial aid
- Legal assistance
- Case management
- Emotional support
- Family group decision-making
- Supports for children

Most States have used their [title IV-B subpart 2 funding](#) to create kinship navigator websites directing kin caregivers to various government and community benefits. (See, for example, kinship navigator websites from [California](#), [Idaho](#), [Kentucky](#), and [Wisconsin](#).)

Research suggests that kinship navigator programs strengthen cross-system collaboration and result in increased services and reduced needs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019; Schmidt & Treinen, 2017). Kinship navigator programs also have been shown to improve permanency outcomes (Schmidt & Treinen, 2021).

Find [State kinship care contacts and website links](#) to kinship navigator programs on the Information Gateway website. Related information is available through Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Kinship Navigator Programs Around the United States](#).

## Financial Support

Adding children to a household is expensive. Many kinship families report food insecurity, inadequate housing, and insufficient child care assistance. Kin caregivers may be eligible for a variety of programs that can help them, such as the following:

- **[Title IV-E Foster Care Program maintenance payments](#)**. These payments are available for licensed kin caregivers raising children under the placement and care of a child welfare agency. Amounts paid may vary depending on the child's age, needs, and State of residence. (For more information, contact your [State Foster Care Program Manager](#).)
- **[Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program \(GAP\) payments](#)**. Also referred to as "Kin-GAP," these payments are an option in many States and some Tribes for eligible children in permanent legal guardianship arrangements with relatives.
- **[Title IV-E Adoption Assistance payments](#)**. These payments may be an option for kin caregivers who adopt an eligible child with special needs or circumstances from foster care (e.g., children with certain medical conditions or disabilities, older children, children who are part of a sibling group).
- **TANF**. This program can provide a monthly subsidy to eligible kin caregivers. In most States, relatives caring for a child do not need to have legal custody to apply for TANF benefits, but they must meet their State's TANF definition of a kin caregiver. Some kinship families may be concerned that applying for TANF enables the agency

to seek child support from the family of origin, but many States offer "good cause" exceptions to this policy (Generations United, 2021).

- **[National Family Caregiver Support Program](#)**. This program aids grandparents or others aged 55 and older raising children younger than 18 or caring for older relatives. The program provides support in accessing services, respite care, individual counseling, support groups, and caregiver training.
- **[Supplemental Security Income](#)**. This program provides monthly payments to people with disabilities and older adults and children who have little or no income or resources.
- **[Child Care. Head Start](#)** and other child care programs help families with low incomes afford child care. State eligibility rules vary for primary caregivers who are working or attending school to access child care.

To learn more about federal benefits programs and eligibility, see the [USA.gov benefit finder tool](#).

## Health and Nutrition Assistance

Kinship families also may be eligible for the following programs to help them take care of basic health and nutritional needs:

- **[Medicaid](#)** and the **[Children's Health Insurance Program](#)** provide low-cost health coverage for eligible people with lower incomes, including older adults, children, and people with disabilities. Caregivers can [contact their State Medicaid office](#) to see if they are eligible.

- The [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP), previously known as food stamps, offers monthly benefits to families with lower incomes to buy food. To get more information or apply, caregivers must [contact a local SNAP office](#).
- The [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children](#) (WIC) provides healthy food and nutrition education to support parents, caregivers, and their children younger than 5 years old.

### Respite Care

Kin caregivers often need reliable and regular respite care to give them a break from their caregiving responsibilities. This may be particularly important for older relatives or those taking care of children who have experienced significant trauma or have disabilities. Many States and community organizations offer respite care ranging from a few hours to overnight and weekends. Local [Area Agencies on Aging](#) often support respite care for older caregivers. In situations where formal respite services are not available, caseworkers can help kin caregivers identify their informal support systems—neighbors, friends, and extended family members—for potential relief. Find respite providers and programs using the ARCH [National Respite Locator Service](#). ARCH also offers [resources for caregivers on planning, selecting, and paying for respite](#), including a [respite factsheet for grandparents and other relatives](#).

### Support Groups

Many kin caregivers find great comfort and practical advice when talking with others in similar circumstances (Generations United, 2021). Support groups and peer-

to-peer mentoring provide caregivers with an invaluable source of social support and a forum for sharing tips and resources. Use Generations United's [search tool](#) in its intergenerational program database to find kin caregiver programs across the country.

### Caseworker Training

Caseworkers assigned kinship care cases should receive training on the specific skills and competencies required to work effectively with the kinship triad (parents, children, and kin caregivers). Training may include information and skill building on how to do the following:

- Assess families and identify risk factors, safety factors, strengths, and needs
- Use family-centered practice to develop a plan that meets the needs of the child and family
- Address the challenges of kinship care with sensitivity to the families' strengths, needs, and background
- Locate and access services available to kin caregivers
- Navigate the ICPC to get approval for placement with an out-of-State relative, where appropriate
- Integrate extended family into family team meetings and decision-making
- Help caregivers manage stress and avoid burnout

Talk to your supervisor about training opportunities in your agency.

## CONCLUSION

When relatives or close friends take care of children who can no longer remain at home, those children experience less instability and a stronger sense of security, identity, and belonging than children placed in nonrelative foster care. Kinship care can help maintain family bonds, traditions, and values, as well as connections to schools, friends, and communities. To help improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children, child welfare professionals can welcome and treat kin caregivers as partners, attend to their unique needs, and facilitate access to supportive services.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Child Welfare Information Gateway

- *Advances in Supporting Kinship Caregivers* [Podcast series]: [Episode 77](#) (Rhode Island), [Episode 78](#) (Washington State), [Episode 79](#) (Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe), [Episode 80](#) (Nevada), and [Episode 81](#) (New Mexico)
- [Kinship Care](#) [Webpage]
- [Kinship Care and the Child Welfare System](#) [Factsheet for Families]
- [State Kinship Care Contacts and Programs](#) [Directory]

### Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network

- [Helping Caregivers Address a Parent's Absence](#)
- [How Relative/Kin Caregivers Can Access Services and Advocate for Native Children in Their Care](#)
- [Kinship/Grandfamilies: Strengths and Challenges](#)
- [Reaching Rural Kinship/Grandfamilies](#)

- [Resource Guides for Kin Caregivers and Those Who Work With Them](#) [Directory]

### Resources From State Organizations

- [Kinship Care Toolkit](#) (New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports)
- [Kinship Caregiver Legal Guide](#) (Michigan State University, Kinship Care Resource Center)
- [Kinship Catalogue](#) [Webinars and Training Library] (University of Kentucky College of Social Work)
- [Kinship Navigator Reference Guides and Handouts](#) (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Kinship Navigator Program)
- [Mental Health and Self Care Videos for Kinship Caregivers](#) (Missouri Kinship Navigator Program)

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