

KINSHIP CARE



What is Kinship Care?

A Kinship Carer is the term used to describe a person who looks after a child, when they are not able to live with their parents. They may be related to the child (through blood, marriage or civil partnership) or a person with whom the child has a pre-existing relationship.

There are lots of reasons why children may live in a kinship arrangement, sometimes this happens on a planned basis or it may be in response to concerns about the child's care which means it is not safe for them to live with their parents.

Aberdeen City Council values and respects the unique role played by Kinship Carers and children in this arrangement and recognises that they can have better outcomes than alternative care settings. Often children experience less disruption in their life, they do better in education, have a stronger sense of identity and more meaningful contact with parents and other family members.

What kind of Kinship arrangements are there?

All carers, who come to provide care for a child or young person are called Kinship Carers. However, such carers fall into two categories **formal or informal**, this is determined by how the child came to be in the kinship arrangement.

This is important because of the different legal responsibilities that Aberdeen City Council has to a child living in a formal arrangement, compared to an informal care arrangement.

Often these are private arrangements made by the family **without** the active involvement of any of the public services. As long as the child is properly taken care of there is no remit for Local Authority involvement (except where Private Foster Care requirements apply.) This is often referred to as **private kinship arrangements or informal kinship carers** and the child is not legally considered 'Looked After'. In some situations the children may have social work involvement under section 22 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

In these circumstances the carer is unlikely to be entitled to statutory support, although will be able to access advice and guidance.

Private Kinship Carers may still be entitled to claim universal benefits for a child and could contact your local Citizens Advice centre or Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland on 0808 800 0006.

Formal Kinship Care: Where the social work service is involved in recommending that a child is not able to stay with their parents and alternative care needs to be considered. If kinship is an available and safe option, this will always be considered first.

Therefore, if the social work service has been involved at the time of a child being looked after by family or friends, this is known as Formal Kinship Care. These carers may be considered as looking after a child who is "Looked After" or "non looked after" (this will depend on the child's legal status).

Formal Kinship Carers are likely to be eligible for Kinship Allowance and other statutory supports. These placements require to be regulated and monitored by the local authority. ***(More information can be found in Kinship Allowance Leaflet and a Legal Option in Kinship Care Leaflet)***

In instances of shared care with a birth parent, or where a child is living with a birth parent in the household of friends and family this is not deemed a kinship placement, even when recommended by social work as part of the child's plan.

How to become a Kinship Carer?

In many instances' Kinship Carers are people already supporting the child or their family and have some knowledge about the child's changing circumstances. It may be that a child is placed in a kinship arrangement in response to an emergency.

If you would like to be considered as a Kinship Carer, it is helpful that you first make the child's parents aware, however in all instances you should inform the child's social worker directly.

Regardless of how a child comes to be in a kinship arrangement, a Viability Assessment will be undertaken in all instances to explore your circumstances, ensure you are able to meet the child's needs and identify any support requirements.

This Viability Assessment is undertaken by the child's social worker in consultation with the Kinship Team and will require active input from you as potential Kinship Carers.

How long does Kinship Care Last for?

When a child is placed in your care by the Local Authority there will likely have been extensive attempts to support the parents to manage the care of the child and whilst the priority is rehabilitation, this is not always achievable. Therefore, it is important that Kinship Carers fully consider all aspects of caring for the child, on what could be a long-term basis, before committing to the arrangement.

The duration of a kinship placement will be determined by the Child's Plan. Sometimes Kinship placements may also be used on a temporary basis until an alternative care is identified.

- A Temporary Kinship placement could be described as a few weeks/ months or up to a year.
- A Permanent Kinship placement would be described as the place where the child will grow up until adulthood.

Assessment of Kinship Carers

In formal kinship care arrangements, the Local Authority has a legal responsibility and duty to assess the suitability of a Kinship Carer/s. This assessment is ongoing from the point of your initial contact with the professionals and will consider your involvement in the child's life from birth.

A Viability Assessment will be undertaken prior to or begin immediately when the child is placed and must be completed within six weeks to meet statutory requirements. The outcome of this Viability Assessment will determine the immediate suitability of the Kinship Carers. If the child is to remain in placement a more comprehensive assessment will be undertaken by a member of the Kinship Team.

The kinship assessment process can take several months and is likely to involve tasks such as:

- Home visits from social workers and other relevant professionals
- Conversations and sharing personal information.
- Exploring your motivations to care for the child.
- Attendance and presentation at planning, education, health meetings for the child
- Exploring relationships and lifestyle of people living in the same house as the child
- Discussing the people around you, who can offer support in assistance in caring for the child.
- If the kinship carers are birth parents, their child's care circumstances will be taken into account and information sought from relevant professionals.
- There are mandatory checks which will be undertaken these include a criminal history check, you will be required to be accepted onto the PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme), a Medical, Local Authority Checks, Health and Safety Check of the home. These will be undertaken by the kinship team when notified of placement. These forms are undertaken in partnership with other agencies, should a kinship carer refuse to comply, it may jeopardise the care arrangement.
- We will also ask you to provide three references from people who can speak to your care of the child.
- If you are already caring for the child, your ability to meet their day-to-day and long-term needs will be of key significance.

At all times throughout the assessment the child's social worker and the assessing worker will need to consider the best interests of the child to ensure you are the right person to care for the child. There may be concerns, and implications involved for you and your family and these will be discussed with you throughout.

Each assessment will explore the strengths and vulnerabilities and support needs of the of the Kinship Carer/s and family; To determine the most appropriate recommendation as to whether you should become an approved Kinship Carer.

Depending on the outcome of the assessment and the child's circumstances, the recommendations will be presented to either a Looked After Child Review or a Kinship Panel, who will independently review the assessment and determine the approval of the Kinship Carer. The information gathered for the report will be shared with others to inform their decision.

Roles and expectations of kinship carers

Kinship Carers have the same responsibilities as if they were parents. They must provide a safe, stable and nurturing home environment within a family which is able to prioritise and meet the child's individual, emotional, social and educational needs.

They need to be able to work openly and honestly with professional around the child inside and out with their home. There are likely to be various planning meetings for the carer to attend, particularly in the early part of a placement and carers will need to be able to attend and speak about their care of the child and contribute to the care plan. It is also important that Kinship Carers play a positive role in promoting safe family contact, and any restrictions that may be in place.

Each child should have a Care Plan and the Kinship Carer will have access to reports and information that equips them to understand the child's early experiences and care needs. It is important that carers handle information regarding the child they care for and the wider family sensitively and with confidentiality. Should they wish to discuss information within reports they can contact the author, child's social worker or kinship worker.

Aberdeen City Councils Duties to Kinship Carers

Aberdeen City have many Kinship Carers living across the UK who are caring for children who originate from Aberdeen. Each child's circumstances are unique to them and there is a recognition that each Kinship Carer will be at different stages in their caring role. Some may be new to the role or newly placed and carers who have been looking after children for long periods of time, with differing levels of experience, support or professional involvement.

The Looked After Children Regulations 2009 highlight the duty of local authorities to provide appropriate supports for Kinship Carers.

In recognition of the rewards, complexities and challenges in caring for a Kinship child, Aberdeen City Council developed its' Kinship Team in November 2018.

The Kinship Team provides support to Formal Kinship Carers whose children are:

- Looked after and accommodated by the local authority.
- Placed by Aberdeen City Council with Kinship Carer's.
- Subject to, or whose carer's are considering applying for, a Kinship Care Order as outlined in Part 13 of the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Kinship Care Assistance (Scotland) Order 2016.

The Kinship Team sits within the Alternative Family Care Service within Integrated Children Services. As such there are close working relationships the child's social worker and professional network around the child and corporate parents and partners.

This multiagency working ensures better outcomes for the child and kinship family; however, the Kinship Team work predominantly to identify, assess and support the adults as Kinship Carer's.

Types of support available from the Kinship Team

- Quarterly newsletters and regular information distributed via mailing list.
- Face-to-face and/or online training and information sessions.
- Advice on financial and legal matters.
- Financial support, for those entitled to Kinship Allowance.
- Information and signposting about support services and resources.
- PEEP Kinship support group
(a play activities program for children aged 0- 5 years and their carer's).
- Kinship Carer Support Groups
(currently running on a monthly basis for carers to meet and receive support from one another and staff, these are informal sessions with refreshments and speakers)

We can provide one to one support to:

- Understand and manage behavior.
- Understand and manage parental contact and navigate difficult family relationships.
- Promote the needs and development of the child you care for
- Understand the role of a Kinship Carer and local authority procedures, such as formal meetings and Care Plans.
- Identify services to promote your own mental and physical wellbeing.

For those carers living out with Aberdeen the Kinship Team can explore services and support groups available in their local area. Provide access to online training courses and be available via Telephone or Skype calls. Visits can also be arranged as required.

How do I access this support?

It is recognized that when a child is first placed, that it can be life changing for the carer and that more intensive support can be beneficial at these times. When the Kinship Team become aware of a child being placed with a Kinship Carer, they will contact them to discuss their circumstances and individual supports needs.

It may be that short or long-term support is beneficial as at each life stage of a child and their Kinship Carer, support needs can change over time.

Please feel free to contact the team at any point for advice and guidance, which can be offered over the phone or we will happily arrange to visit you too. It may be that short- or long-term support best suits your needs!

Contact the Kinship team by phone on 01224 694554 or email kinship@aberdeencity.gov.uk

A duty system is in operation and any communication will be responded to as quickly as possible within working hours, 8.30am to 5pm.

The Out of Hours Service can respond to emergency situations on **0300 303 0903**

Address: Kinship Team, Alternative Family Care, Integrated Children and Family Service, Quarry Centre, Cummings Park Crescent, Aberdeen, AB16 7A

Website: [Aberdeen City MyLife - Kinship \(mylifeportal.co.uk\)](http://Aberdeen City MyLife - Kinship (mylifeportal.co.uk))

Are there any other services that can help?

The Local Authority is committed to ensuring that Kinship Carers have access to independent information in respect of the important role they undertake.

Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland provides a free, impartial, and confidential helpline which gives advice and support on all matters relating to kinship. On range of matters including emotional support, Legal issues, Financial, Benefits, Welfare Rights, and provides workshops and training opportunities for carers and professionals.

Helpline: 0808 800 0006, open weekdays 10am-2.30pm Email: kinship@adoptionuk.org.uk

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/kinshipcarecas/> Website: <https://www.kinship.scot>

Children's 1st: National Kinship Care Helpline

The kinship care helpline is there to listen, and to offer advice, support and information.

Telephone: 08000 28 22 33

Webpage: www.children1st.org.uk

Email: parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau:

Advisors in every Citizens Advice Bureau in Scotland can provide advice and information about kinship care and they can also access additional, specialist advice where necessary.

Scotland: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/> Advice Line: 0131 550 1000

England: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/> Advice Line: 0800 144 8848

Aberdeen Young Persons Rights

Email: YoungPersonsRights@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Webpage: aberdeengettingitright.org.uk/young-peoples-rights/

Who Cares Scotland: Call 0141 226 4441

Webpage www.whocarescotland.org

Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland:

Webpage www.cpag.org.uk/scotland Email address advice@cpagscotland.org.uk

CPAG in Scotland advice line for advisers on benefits and tax credits: 0141 552 0552

Monday to Thursday 10am – 4pm and Friday 10am to 12 noon

Scottish Child Law Centre:

Provide free expert legal advice and information to children and young people, their families and carers, and professionals working for and with children by providing free expert legal advice and information through their advice line, email, and website.

Advice Line: 0131 667 6333

Webpage: www.sclc.org.uk