



A Guide To Kinship Care:
Resources And Services
To Help You Care
For Your Unique Family



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**KINSHIP
NAVIGATION**
A Program of NCHS

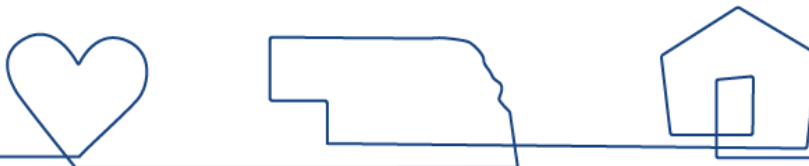
The History of Kinship Care

Throughout time, families have helped to care for their relative's children in times of need. Whether this is during times of illness, financial hardship, or another family crisis, many cultures have upheld the practice of caring for one another when they can.

In many societies, this kind of care, where children are placed with appropriate kin, occurs outside the social service or courts. In the past, people questioned if a formal introduction to the child welfare system would be the best thing for children in need of care. But, today, studies have shown that a kinship care approach benefits children the most.

When children are taken care of by their friends or family, they often have an easier time adjusting to the new lifestyle changes, have fewer instances of behavioral or psychological troubles, and face less pressure and challenges in their education.

Today, there are nearly **2.7 million children in kinship care** situations in the United States alone. These kids need family and community support, economic stability, access to education, and **resources to sustain a healthy life** in order to thrive. With kinship care, that goal can become a reality.





What Is Modern-Day Kinship Care?

We understand there are instances when a biological parent is unable to provide a safe and healthy environment for their child. Being a caregiver is extremely rewarding, but not usually without a large strain on your own wellbeing. Your mental and physical needs are important and ultimately help demonstrate health and happiness to the children in your care. By providing a resource for the biological parent as well as the caregiver, modern kinship care helps create a healthier environment for children to thrive.

Often, the people stepping into a kinship role are already closely involved in a child's life. Family members, family friends, and other supportive parenting figures are able to help provide a safe, stable, and loving home environment for their loved one's child. These are kinship caregivers.

It's important to note that kinship care does not permanently alter the rights and responsibilities of the biological parent to the new caregiver. Rather, it is a function of caring for a child that is often aimed at future reunification, where the biological parent will resume primary care of their child once they are safely able to do so. While the biological parent takes time to get the help and support they need to become a thriving parent again; the kinship caregiver takes over primary caregiving responsibilities. And, as a kinship caregiver, you need access to resources, support, advice, and aid to help you provide the best level of care possible for the children in your life. Read on and discover the varying levels of kinship care and the sort of connections and resources you can gain access to as a kinship caregiver.





The Varying Levels of Kinship Care

When it comes to kinship care, there are varying levels of guardianship and legal recognition status. In some situations, families make arrangements or agreements among themselves to provide care for the children in their life. In other situations, child welfare professionals may need to step in and help develop a course of action to ensure the children's mental, emotional, physical, and psychological needs are being met. Below we break down the three levels of kinship care:

1. Private Or Informal Kinship Care

Private or informal kinship care is typically the level with the least legal recognition. In this situation, families make arrangements with one another to temporarily delegate the parental rights and care for the children in need to the kinship caregiver without permanently altering the rights.

2. Diversion Kinship Care

Sometimes, child welfare agencies become involved in arranging for the care of a child with other family members. In one way or another, a child welfare agency may become aware of the child's needs and work together to create a strategy for moving the child into the care of a relative without joining the formal child welfare system. These moves are often voluntary.

3. Licensed Or Unlicensed Kinship Care

The final level of kinship care involves children living with other family members but remaining in the legal custody of the state in which they reside. While these children are being cared for by a close friend or relative, they are considered part of the formal child welfare system.





How Do You Prepare To Step Up As A Kinship Caregiver?

You've decided to step up and help care for your friend or family member's child while they cannot. While it is an exciting time getting ready to welcome them into your home, you're sure to have questions about how best to prepare and plan for the latest addition to your family. While your role as a kinship caregiver will inevitably change over the course of your relationship, there are a few things you can do to ensure a smooth experience.

Determine A Routine Together

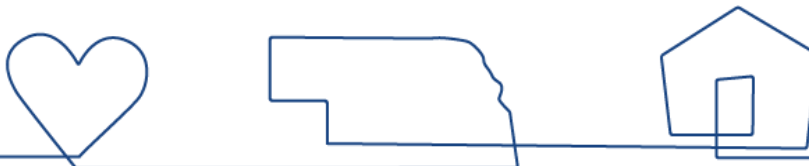
Part of transitioning to a new home life is working to adjust to your new surroundings. One way to weave some structure back into your days is to embrace a blend of traditions and routines. While there will inevitably be some changes as you cannot make everything the same, kinship caregivers need to respect the traditions, culture, and identity of the children in their care.

Respect the time and space it will take for you and your family to adjust to this new situation. Don't try to rush or force deeper relationships on anyone, as it could have the opposite effect and drive the child farther from you. Slowly start to create some structure back into their life by talking to them about bedtimes, mealtimes, expectations around the house (i.e., picking up toys, cleaning up messes, etc.), and nighttime routines. Work together to find a routine that works for you so that both parties feel included in the decision-making process.

Tip: Having a routine and reliable structure is crucial for the development of children. In many cases, the children you care for might not have had a reliable parental figure to ensure they follow house rules and stick to their schedule. It might be a challenge getting them on board initially, but the payoff is worth the effort!

Get Your House Ready

They say that a clean space gives you a clean mind. Take this mindset into consideration as you prepare your home for your new addition.





Go through your house to clean up any clutter and make space for the child coming into your home. If possible, try to find a space in your home that the child(ren) can have as their own, so they feel they have a space to go to for comfort and privacy. This will help to reduce the amount of shock that comes from the initial transition in home life.

Do you know some of the favorite snacks, dinners, or toys of the child(ren) you'll be caring for? Get a few of those goodies to have on hand for when they first come live with you. These small things might seem insignificant, but they can help ease any stress, nervousness, or hesitations you both have to this new situation.

Remember: Grand gestures and expensive, flashy things are often not what kids love the most. Small, meaningful gestures that demonstrate how much you care for them will leave a long-lasting impact.

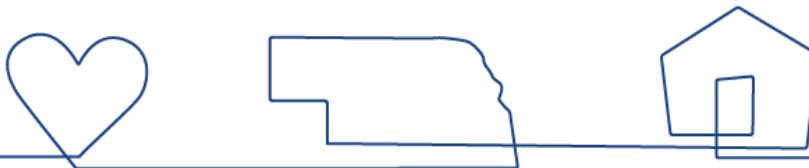
Respect Each Other's Boundaries

When preparing to become a kinship caregiver, the biggest thing to remember is that respect and boundaries are crucial. Both you and the child have been through some significant changes to your daily routine, and it takes time and effort to adjust.

Approach conversations with your child from an angle of respect and love. Talk with them about how they feel, what you can do to help with the transition, and how excited and happy you are to care for them. Give both you and your child the space to speak freely and honestly, and a relationship built on trust, honesty, and respect is set up for success.

What Kind Of Support Do Kinship Caregivers Typically Need?

Caring for someone else's child can seem like a daunting task. We understand that there are a lot of new responsibilities on your plate, and you may feel stressed or overwhelmed about taking on this new role. However, there are many outlets and resources available to help you better prepare for the new adjustment and ensure you are putting the health and safety of you and the children in your care first. Below are a few examples of areas where kinship caregivers seek support when transitioning into their new parenting role.





Legal Needs

Understandably, this is most likely an all-new experience for you, the child(ren) in question, and the biological parents. That's why many kinship caregivers reach out for guidance and support. When it comes to kinship care, everyone has specific **rights and responsibilities** that must be respected and upheld. Some of these rights include:

Rights of the child:

- Be treated fairly and with respect
- Have contact with their family and community
- Take part in making important decisions affecting their life.
- Uphold their own beliefs and way of life

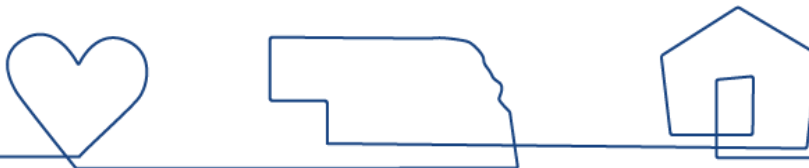
Rights of the biological parent:

- Be kept informed of the whereabouts of their child, unless deemed otherwise by community services out of fear for the child's safety
- Be informed of their child's development and informed on who the kinship carers are
- Seek help and assistance to work towards reunification

Rights of the kinship caregiver:

- Be treated fairly and with respect
- Be given information on the potential child they will care for, and have the right to say no if they so choose
- Be offered training opportunities to expand your parenting skills and knowledge
- Make most day-to-day care decisions for the child or young person
- Receive information about services that can support you in your role as a carer

While these are just some of the various rights and responsibilities regarding kinship care, they help to highlight the differences in expectations in your roles. Additionally, there are a few things that the parent and kinship caregiver need to do before





embracing a kinship care situation. If you are going to become a kinship caregiver, be sure to get **four things documents in order**:

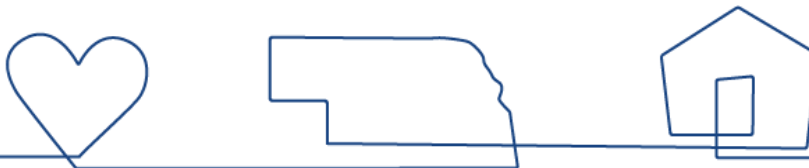
- 1. Appointment of Short-Term Guardian Form.** This document, filed and signed by the parent, designates another adult (you) as the temporary caregiver for their child in their absence.
- 2. Emergency Contacts.** People need to know how to contact the person caring for the child in question, as well as the closest relatives/friends of the kinship caregiver. A list of emergency contacts helps provide transparency and prepares you for any potential issues.
- 3. An Updated Estate Plan.** It's important to have plans in place in case anything should happen to you. A proper estate plan addresses who can care for your children in an emergency, and other stipulations, such as how your money and assets can go to them without having to go through a long process.
- 4. Emergency Cards.** Consider carrying around emergency contact cards that list out your information and your closest relatives or friends in case of problems.

These four things are just some of the ways you can prepare in advance for a kinship care situation. Talk with legal experts to see what steps need to be taken to finalize the kinship care process.

Emotional And Mental Needs

This period of transition is tough for everyone. For the child, they're in a new environment and facing a situation they never expected. Even if they know that you caring for them is for the best, it can be tough to process their thoughts and feelings on the matter in a healthy way. It can be extremely beneficial for these children to have certified specialists and peer support groups to talk through their emotions. Certified specialists can help them to work through their trauma and blockades, while peer support groups can show them that they are not alone in experiencing this and that there is a whole army of support out there if they need it.

For the people providing kinship care, knowing that there is support and guidance to help them in this journey is essential. After all, to be the best parenting version of





yourself, you need to ensure you're prioritizing your mental and emotional health. Many people have experienced what you're going through right now. Tap on them for support, someone to talk to when you're feeling overwhelmed, or advice on how to navigate these waters.

Financial Needs

In some situations, those providing kinship care may qualify for financial assistance. Granted that you meet the eligibility requirements of federal, state, or local agencies, you may be entitled to financial compensation to help offset some of the expenses associated with childcare. While financial assistance is not a guarantee for everyone, it is worth researching more to see if you qualify.

Developmental Resources

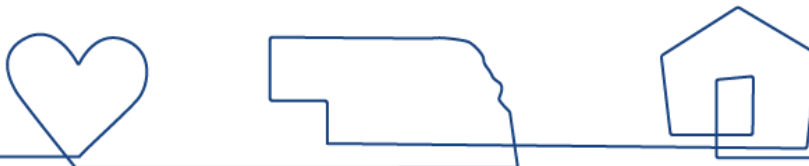
Statistics have shown the importance of emphasizing social and educational development in young children. To gain the social and educational skills they need later in life, kinship caregivers and parents need to help nurture and develop their child(ren)'s mind and curiosities.

Ensuring the child in your care is enrolled in classes (if they are old enough) or are exercising their mind and body with educational toys, resources, and games helps them grow to be productive, successful members of society.

It can be overwhelming and difficult to keep everything organized and ensure you're checking off all the necessary boxes. But, with the support of kinship care specialists, you can be sure you've got everything you need for the job.

Kinship Navigation: The Answer You've Been Looking For

Over the years, many studies have assessed the impact of change and home-life transitions on young children. Researchers found that when children are kept around loved ones, rather than being removed from their homes, they **develop at a higher rate**.





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What does this mean?

Children benefit from being cared for by people they know and can rely on. Stability is the overall goal when it comes to raising a child — every child has a right to a safe and loving home. NCHS works to make this right a reality through Kinship Navigation.

Kinship Navigation: An Overview

Regardless of how you came to be caring for the child or children in your home, Kinship Navigation can guide you to the emotional, financial, legal, and physical resources your family needs. If you are a kinship caregiver providing full-time care for a child, we're here to help you in your responsibilities.

At NCHS, we know that while caring for a child can be incredibly rewarding, it can also have a significant impact on financial stability, emotional balance in the home, and lead to feeling overwhelmed when you attempt to navigate towards resources you need. Kinship Navigation helps you move beyond the clutter, create an action plan, and grow to provide the best parenting you can for the child(ren) in your care.

Services We Offer

Kinship Navigation supports caregivers and children with an extensive library of resources. Our connections to community services, education materials, peer support groups, and certified specialists mean we are equipped to help you with essentially anything you might encounter. Some of the services that we offer include connecting you with:

- **Benefits** — we connect you to services that include support for the cost of food, healthcare, or living expenses.
- **Educational Classes** — we connect you to training opportunities on parenting, becoming involved in your children's lives, becoming self-sufficient and independent, and more!
- **Emotional and Mental Health Support** — we've said it before, and we'll say it again: the mental and emotional health of you and your child is paramount. Let us help connect you to support groups to keep your spirits strong.
- **Legal Advice and Aid** — our connections to legal experts and specialists mean you'll have access to advice if and when you need it.





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- **Personal Care Items** — raising a child is a challenging task; there are many things you need to consider, like food, clothing, hygiene supplies, school supplies, and more. Through Kinship Navigation, we connect you to outlets that help you obtain the items you need.
- **Stress Management** — everyone deals with stress, but it's how you manage it, process it, and move from it that matters. Let us connect you with certified specialists that help you create productive approaches to manage stress.

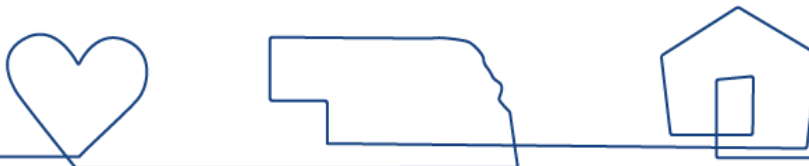
While these services are specific to our Kinship Navigation program, NCHS offers a variety of continuous education programs to strengthen your skills as a parent and connections to the children in your care. [To learn more about these other services, check out our website.](#)

How To Get Started

It might seem scary to have to ask for help, but know that you are not alone! Every day, thousands of parents and kinship caregivers deal with the same or similar questions, hesitations, and challenges you're facing. Together, we can overcome these hurdles and support you in your parenting journeys.

There is no obligation, only opportunity.

Get connected with a support system, resources designed specifically for you, and a peer network, so you don't have to do this alone. To access these resources and assistance, all it takes is a simple call or email. By calling [888.315.7347](tel:888.315.7347) or emailing us at kinship@nchs.org, you'll quickly connect with a Kinship Navigation Intake Coordinator who will help to empower you on your kinship care journey.





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About NCHS

Since 1893, Nebraska Children's Home Society (NCHS) has held the fundamental belief that children come first.

By providing a variety of services, community resources, and educational programs, we work to help you make an informed decision regarding your parenting role.

Our services range from educational classes for new parents, family-centered activities to encourage fathers to become more involved in their children's lives, support groups for grandparents caring for their grandchildren, and connections with certified specialists to help you determine the best course of action for you and your family.

Regardless of where you are in your parenting journey, we can connect you with the resources you need to strengthen your skills and make an informed decision.



KIN-TECH™ is an evidence-based kinship navigation practice model which is transforming communities and child welfare. KIN-TECH™ is a registered trademark of the Children's Home Network used here by permission.

