



Guide to Creating Kinship-Friendly Schools

Presented by:



Acknowledgements

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Finally, thank you to Ohio schools. We created this with you in mind so that staff members have the knowledge needed to support all families well. Tips and information you find here are intended for practical, real-time application.



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Introduction

Kinship care is the full-time care and nurturing of a child or youth by a relative or someone with a significant emotional connection to the child, such as a close family friend, when parents are not able to provide care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau). Kinship may be temporary or permanent. It can consist of a formal custody arrangement or an informal one.

When out-of-home care is needed, kinship care is the preferred option because it can reduce trauma and help children maintain family bonds, a sense of belonging, and their identity. It is widely accepted that children who are raised by kinship caregivers have better lifetime outcomes, including academic achievement, than their counterparts raised in other foster care settings, such as "stranger" foster care or congregate care.

It is important to note that kinship itself is not a "problem" to be resolved by schools or communities. It is a kindness and a gift by caregivers who step up for children and parents that need support, and it should be acknowledged and honored as such.

Quick Facts

2.5 million children are in kinship care in the United States, and 127,000 (5%) of Ohio children live in a kinship home.

In 2021, an estimated 117,000 Ohio children were being raised by kin (GRANDFACTS, 2022).

In 2023, 49% of the kinship caregivers calling OhioKAN were grandparents and great-grandparents, and 17% were aunts and uncles (OhioKAN, Family Characteristics, 2023).

In 2023, 50% of the kinship caregivers calling OhioKAN were 51 years of age or older, and 21% were 61 or older (OhioKAN, Adult Demographics, 2023).

Authentic voice:

"If not for my caregiver (my mom, Lillian), I would not have had the life I do now. I've grown into a happy, healthy young adult. I had incredible opportunities in a great school district. Recently, I had an internship in Luxembourg through Miami University. Without my guardians, I could not have had that opportunity. I would not be where I am without the care, attention and extra love I received."

– Tabby Perry, college student
raised by her grandmother

The purpose of this guide is to provide all school staff members with an overview of ways to be supportive to children and their trusted caregivers. Being aware of kinship is not a duty simply for school counselors or social workers in your building. Kinship awareness is for everyone: from administrative assistants to cafeteria workers to the gym teacher. Every child's educational experience benefits when we know more about how to reduce unintended harm and increase best practices.

Awareness of kinship care and related concepts helps build competence and capacity in our interactions with children and adults. Early identification of children and youth being raised by kin helps schools to meet students' needs sooner. This does not mean that we share sensitive personal information about a family unnecessarily or in detail with other school team members. It does mean that when a family, young person, or child may have unique needs, it's important to consider whether there may be a good reason for that extra care request, rather than feel put off by suggestions from a staff member, family member or school partner advocating for the student.

We have outlined key kinship topics and provided links to additional resources for those who want to learn more. Becoming familiar with this guide can benefit your communication exchanges, not only with kinship families, but with all families.

“They told me I was eligible for help as a ‘kinship caregiver,’ I smiled. ‘I thought I was Grandma!’”

Let’s begin by recognizing that families or school staff may or may not be familiar with the term “kinship.” Almost no adult with a child appears in the school office and says, “Hi, we are a kinship family.” They are more likely to say, “I’m taking care of [child name] at the moment while their parent is [unavailable].”

It often becomes incumbent upon the school professional to recognize the kinship circumstance based on situational clues. Many kinship families have no idea that they might be eligible to tap into additional support or resources. School team members have the important and potentially rewarding opportunity to connect families with helpful people or agencies. Many kinship families may not know that they might be eligible to tap into additional support of kinship, or adoptive-specific, benefits and resources.

Introducing the term kinship at an appropriate time or as part of ongoing training can lead school personnel to a greater understanding of resources that could greatly benefit children or families. Further, information on kinship care should be viewed in the same way as any other beneficial school enrollment information. By sharing this life-enhancing knowledge with parents and caregivers as a standard part of personnel training, schools can both introduce the subject to caregivers and spread knowledge to the community.



Photo of Lillian McCree and Tabby Perry.

Authentic voice:



“When I stepped in to take care of my granddaughter, I didn’t know that there was a word for what I was doing. My parents told me they were proud of me for what I was doing for their great-granddaughter. I responded that I was doing no more than what your grandmothers did for you. For sad reasons, both my parents were raised by extended parents. Later, I came to learn the legacy and term kinship caregiver; that is me.”

— Lillian McCree, grandmother,
“Mom,” to Tabby Perry

“Until this project came into my life, I was unaware of the term “kinship care”. I simply would tell people that my grandparents raised me, but I call them mom and dad. It helps to have the enlightenment of what kinship care is, so that I can inform others of its existence and help them with their experiences.”

— Tabby Perry

To build your knowledge base about kinship, we’ve created this guide with school professionals in mind. Additional information and links to other trainings are included for those who want a broader understanding beyond kinship care. While this resource was created specifically with the experience of kinship families in mind, you may also find many ideas that will help you support foster and adopted children in school settings.

Why Understanding Kinship is Important to Schools

1 **Need to know.** Educators need to know and understand the individual child or youth and their experiences to be able to properly educate them. Kinship caregivers can help schools understand a child's unique history.

2 **Child wellbeing.** Children separated from parents have almost always experienced trauma, grief or loss, which can negatively impact mental health and overall wellbeing. Kinship caregivers help to support wellbeing by preserving important relationships and attending to safety and stability. Students with greater wellbeing are more likely to gain mastery of skills, achieve goals, access their creativity and generally flourish.

3 **Learning loss and recovery.** Trauma, grief and loss can impact a student's ability to focus or concentrate. Teachers, school social workers and psychologists are best able to detect and address learning gaps. With the support of the school and caregivers, learning loss is, in many cases, recoverable.

4 **Trauma responses.** Individual responses to trauma vary, but reactions may show up as problematic behaviors in the classroom and at school-based events. When school personnel can identify disruptive behaviors as trauma responses, they are more able to offer appropriate behavioral interventions and care.

5 **Social-Emotional Learning.** Family instability and transitions between homes can disrupt a child's social-emotional learning. Schools can help facilitate positive peer connections that support teamwork, group learning and conflict resolution.

6 **Stigma and self-esteem.** The experiences that brought the child into kinship care may affect their self-perception. Self-perception can undermine confidence in learning and how a young person or child accepts feedback or correction.

7 **Structure and stability.** Schools can provide predictable schedules and familiar spaces and faces, which help to rebuild a sense of security.

8 **It's been a minute! Parenting 2.0.** Grandparents and older caregivers are separated by generations from raising school-aged children in school. Schools need to identify and support families struggling with technological resources for learning.

9 **Resources exist.** Schools can leverage district tools, events, and community supports to benefit kinship youth and their caregivers. Directing families to programs that can assist with available kinship-specific benefits lightens the load.

10 **Inclusion.** Healthy school cultures are inclusive and welcome diversity. Schools that normalize the varied makeup of families and caregiver relationships, and use more broadly relevant language and learning materials, build inclusivity.

11 **Bonus idea: They are us, and we are them.** There are very likely staff today in your school who have stepped up to be a kinship caregiver to a child.

While your school may already strive to be welcoming for all children, there are additional steps you can take to help children in kinship care be successful in school. See practical steps your school can take beginning on page 12.

Key Concepts

Formal Kinship Care

If someone is in a formal kinship arrangement, the county's child protective services organization or a court might be involved. The school may have received a call or visit from a child's case worker or other appointed individual. It is important that custody documentation is updated in your school tracking system. For some children involved with child welfare, there may be safety concerns. Unfortunately, parental child abductions can occur in contested custody cases or when children have been removed by child welfare. Ensure that school contact information is correct. If you have been notified of any custody disputes, please include the notation in your attendance system, so that when a child is picked up from school, the proper identification is shown and matched with your records. A school counselor or principal should be able to assist in this area if you have questions about having the correct documentation on file.

Informal Kinship Care

There are times when a grandparent, aunt, or other relative takes in a child without formal living arrangement paperwork. Perhaps a crisis occurred, or a parent is sick or has passed away. Informal care may begin quickly. The person who opened their home to the child may not have official documents stating they are the guardian, but they can work toward that process if the care is going to remain long-term.

In some cases, a parent assigns the caregiver power of attorney for health or educational decisions. A school social worker or family peer liaison can help guide the paperwork process as needed. Keep in mind that the adult caregiver may be just as stressed as the child. Your kindness and welcoming demeanor may help the family discover their paperwork first steps. One thing you can do is to always know who in your school or district can help answer kinship questions or connect families to resources. Keep helpful phone numbers and email addresses handy.



Image by pch.vector on Freepik

Tip: If you are not certain of the correct answer to a question, don't guess. Ask someone who knows how to assist. It is OK to say to a family member, "I'm not sure, but I will find out."

Tip: There are kinship specific benefits that families may be unaware of, in addition to the more widely known benefits.

Circumstances That May Lead to Kinship Care

While each situation is unique, these are some common reasons a young person or child may be living without their parent(s). The reason may be multi-faceted.

- Compromised parental health
 - Substance use disorders
 - Mental illness
 - Other chronic illness or debilitating disease
 - Long-term care or hospitalization
- Death of a parent
 - Illness/disease
 - Overdose
 - Suicide
 - Accident
- Family discord/maltreatment
 - Domestic violence
 - Physical/sexual/emotional abuse, neglect, abandonment
 - Child forced to leave the home; “thrown out” of home
 - Not accepting of child’s sexual orientation, gender identity or expression
- Dependency
 - Limited ability of parent(s) to provide adequate care
 - Very young parents
 - Medically fragile children
 - Poverty
 - Homelessness
- Deployed for military service
- Parental Incarceration
- Warfare, political violence, refugee, asylum seeking



A kinship caregiver may also have suffered the loss of the child’s parent, who is often their adult child. They may be navigating how to care for a grieving child while they are coping with their own profound loss.

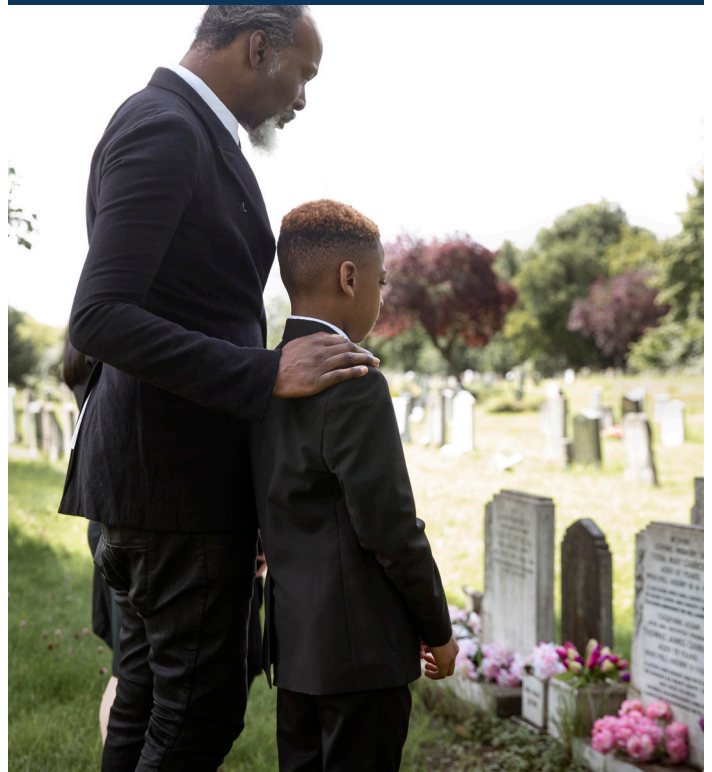


Image by freepik

Tip: Honoring dignity

Be sure to have a direct and private conversation with the caregiver about the young person’s or child’s understanding of the circumstances surrounding their parents. Protect sensitive details not meant for the child at this time, and speak respectfully about the child’s parents, in order to avoid forcing a loyalty conflict. Help caregivers plan for offering more details to the child in age-appropriate ways and discuss how to handle the child’s emotions if difficult information gets shared in school settings.

Trauma

Trauma is a lasting emotional response felt during or after living through one or more distressing event(s). It may not be obvious when a child or adult has experienced trauma, but their behavior may offer clues.

While we know that one important benefit of kinship care is that living in a familiar environment may reduce some aspects of trauma for children, most kinship children (and often their caregivers) are actively dealing with trauma.

For example, a child may “act out” or “shut down.” Remember that behavior can be a very useful method of communication when we pay close attention.

A stressed adult may have trouble thinking clearly or remembering appointments. There is not one way to behave when life is challenging, but when you witness caregiver behavior that may seem out of the ordinary, this could indicate caregiver trauma.

There are three types of trauma (Allarakha, 2024):

- 1 Acute Trauma** may result from a single incident, such as something sudden and unexpected like a house fire.
- 2 Chronic Trauma** is repeated and ongoing. Examples may include domestic violence or a long-term illness. In some cases, children have endured warfare, political violence or the hardships of migration.
- 3 Complex Trauma** refers to a variety of traumatic events or circumstances that are happening in someone’s life.



Image by freepik

Mental bandwidth is a term used to describe how much brain strength someone may have from moment to moment. Just like bodies get tired physically, brains grow weary, too. If someone is experiencing a strained mental bandwidth from trauma, it may be challenging for them to comprehend tasks or directives given by someone with healthy mental bandwidth.

As professionals, we may take great pride in knowing what the school rules are; however, the way we deliver information is important. Here are a few tips: 1. Rushing a caregiver may add to their stress, so take time to listen. 2. Be knowledgeable about who in your school can help families with resources. 3. When you direct a kinship family member to another person or organization, write down the information or phone number and give the paper to the adult, in case they do not have the mental bandwidth at the moment to later recall the information you provided them with. You can also suggest they take a note in their phone.

For more detailed information about trauma, review SAMHSA’s [Practical Guide for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach](#).

For [Trauma-Informed Educator Training](#), consider Cincinnati Children’s Hospital online training that can be completed by either an individual or a group. The training can be broken up into four short sessions, or all sections can be completed in one day. There are videos, activities and discussion points that help build school employee capacity to recognize trauma, and to support families and each other.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

Below is an excerpt definition from Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child:

"The term "ACEs" is an acronym for Adverse Childhood Experiences. It originated in a groundbreaking study conducted in 1995 by the Centers for Disease Control and the Kaiser Permanente health care organization in California. In that study, 'ACEs' referred to three specific kinds of adversity children faced in the home environment—various forms of physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. The key findings of dozens of studies using the original ACEs data are: (1) ACEs are quite common, even among a middle-class population: more than two-thirds of the population report experiencing one ACE, and nearly a quarter have experienced three or more. (2) There is a powerful, persistent correlation between the more ACEs experienced and the greater the chance of poor outcomes later in life..." ("What Are ACEs? And How Do They Relate to Toxic Stress?")



Image by wayhomestudio on Freepik

Trauma and ACES are closely related concepts. As a school team member, you do not have to be an expert on trauma or ACES, but the quality of your interaction with families is better when you are mindful that they exist. Trauma and ACES impact someone's ability to cope in the short and/or long term. You will be most successful when "meeting people where they are," which might look like, for example, being a good listener without expressing judgment of someone's situation.

It is equally important to consider the value of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) and their role in buffering trauma and building resiliency. Caregivers, family members, and other individuals, including school personnel, can support kinship children and youth in having Positive Childhood Experiences.

To learn more, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created a video series called [ACES Training for Educators and School Staff](#).

The CDC has also created a [violence prevention series of trainings](#) to encourage caring communities to discover how to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences.



Image by freepik

Secondary Trauma & Staff Wellness

Witnessing other humans go through difficult times impacts our minds and bodies. You may feel tension in your muscles in the middle or end of the workday or notice that you fall asleep quickly after school. Maybe after hearing about a mom and her children living in their car, you feel grumpy when a child arrives in your office looking for a Band-Aid. Normally you would welcome the child and help easily, but today you feel like it is “one more thing.” If routine tasks in a school begin to feel like too much to handle, you may be experiencing secondary trauma.

When tough stories pile up around us, it can impact our bodies—even when we try to keep our emotions even-keeled. It is good that you have compassion for others, and at the same time, be aware that there is such a thing as compassion fatigue.

Notice your body’s response throughout the day. Be aware when you need a break, when you need to take a walk around the building, to take lunch outside, or to plan a vacation day. In order to be the best YOU when on the job, it is critical that you attend to your own wellness.

The first step of wellness is self-awareness. Pay attention to yourself and care for your needs. Ask for help as needed. Learn about the evidence-based “8 Dimensions of Wellness.” You can learn more about [Staff Wellness](#) in a guide published by the Ohio School-Based Center of Excellence for Prevention & Early Intervention as part of the Ohio School Wellness Initiative.

Taking good care of yourself is vital. Keeping your wellness in check allows you to do your best work on the job and at home.



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Challenge Assumptions

Keep in mind that not all kinship families have the same needs. Some may have raised children before, while others may be first-time caregivers. Some may have familiarity with public benefit systems, and others may not. Building a welcoming relationship with family members can assist you in learning what resources a family might want or need.

Listen to learn, and then either share informative statements or ask questions in kind ways. Non-abrasive language could begin with words like, “Here is our local resource packet that we give to families,” or “I’d like to connect you with our [behavioral health & wellness coordinator, school counselor, school social worker, etc.]. Is it OK for me to have them give you a call?”

Timing is important. If someone is noticeably stressed, they may need immediate help from a school team member rather than a packet of information at that moment. Sometimes the best question to ask is, “What next step would be most helpful right now?”

There are [some common emotional challenges](#) with kinship care like fear, shame, or guilt, but that does not mean every caregiver or child experiences those feelings in the same way or at all.

Tip: Language matching

Listen for the terms that the family uses to describe their situation. For example, if a child’s family refers to an incarcerated parent as being “away,” match the language. “While your mom is away, we’re going to invite your grandma to chaperone the field trip with us.” If a child refers to their guardian as “Margie Mom,” ask if Margie Mom will be able to come to the game tonight.

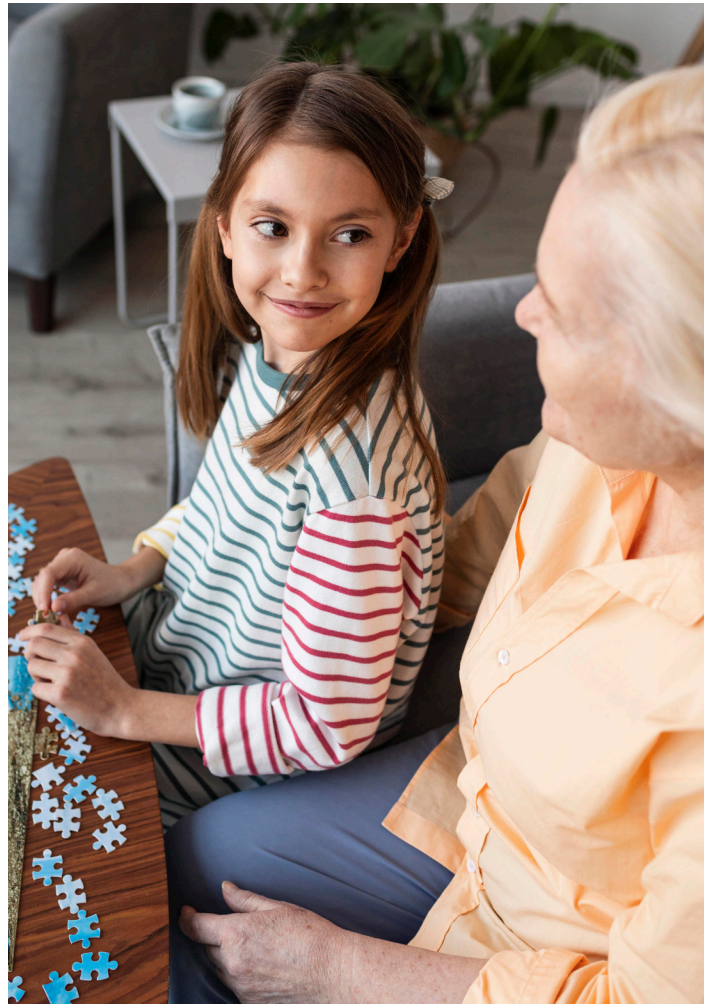


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Authentic voice:

“Above all, language is important, especially knowing what the child calls the kinship caregiver. For me, Tabitha always referred to me as “mom,” even though the school called me grandma. It is a very simple correction that can be done.”

– Lillian McCree, grandmother,
“Mom,” to Tabby Perry

Every Kinship Family Is Unique:

Why it Matters for Students and Schools

Factor	Why it matters
Age of the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eligibility for benefits • child development considerations • early childhood education • academic enrichment • after-school supports
History of child welfare involvement/ foster care/congregate care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eligibility for higher ed scholarships • transient school changes
Age of the caregiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young adult vs. retiree • eligibility for benefits/programs • contingency caregivers • health • activity level • ability to provide transportation
Caregiver experience of the adult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rookie vs experienced • recent or distant • comfort w/tech tools, digital platforms (Final Forms, Progress Book) and tech safety • caregiver supports, groups • supporting attendance • homeschooling considerations
Caregiver relationship to child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eligibility for benefits, relative vs. non-relative • adult sibling, relative, grandparent or fictive kin • sibling caregivers may share a similar trauma history with the child • nature of “parental” authority
Reason(s) child unable to be cared for by parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trauma type • grief supports • stigma, feelings of shame or guilt • eligibility for McKinney-Vento supports • safety plans, if applicable
When the child joined the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immediate needs vs. ongoing needs • attachments to parents, previous or current caregivers • trauma history • transition vs. stabilization in new home and school • new school enrollment vs. known school to the child • social development

Every Kinship Family Is Unique: *(continued)*

Factor	Why it matters
Income of caregivers and children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic needs • familiarity with benefits (TANF-OWF/SNAP) • eligibility for benefits (family and/or child-only) • eligibility for Free & Reduced School Lunch • fees, expenses for school-related activities
Health of the caregiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advanced planning • caregiver supports • respite needs and implications for schooling
Health of the children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • management of chronic or acute conditions • diagnosis of disabilities • IEP • mental health, school-based supports • accommodations • respite needs and implications for schooling • caregiver supports
Legal relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changing legal needs and expenses • school enrollment • medical authorizations • level of expected permanency
Child's contact with parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational authority of parent • attendance at school events • safety plans, if applicable
Child's relationship with siblings and family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school considerations • family supports
Child/family culture and identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • culturally similar, included vs. culturally isolated • LGBTQIA+ affirming • linguistic supports • dietary considerations • holidays and religious considerations
Child's interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supports (activities, transportation, expense, caregiver attendance) • social



Change, change, change - “No crusts, please”

Families who are new to a kinship arrangement may be managing changes large and small in several arenas with little time to prepare. Children may be experiencing new rules, routines and expectations at home. In addition they may be adjusting to a new community and school. One grandmother shared that her grandson was comforted just by the fact that she cut the sandwiches in the way he was used to. Listening to a child's feelings, questions and concerns, and offering them some personal agency on choices that affect them while at school and/or home can help build resiliency for the future.

School Enrollment

Kinship care may begin at any point in the school year. New or existing students walking through your door today may have just begun to live in kinship arrangements.

There are distinct differences between formal kinship, informal kinship, and foster care. Independent of the school setting, a formal kinship arrangement involves a home assessment and approval process over time. (Recent provisions adopted by the state may encourage the kinship caregiver to become licensed as a foster parent in order to receive ongoing financial support. Foster Navigator programs are available to help caregivers through that process.)

Informal kinship may begin during an emergency or crisis, without any child welfare or court involvement, and without any paperwork exchanged.

It is important that children attend school so that they benefit from structure and learning and do not get behind academically.

School enrollment offices can assist caregivers by creating easy-to-read checklists for what is needed during the enrollment process. Consider what you might do to make the enrollment process simple for families.

Check out this video link with helpful ideas from Lorain County. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DnnVezKjOnOkLtB2mA-UIw3TOcHES_1k/view.



Image by freepik

For example, allow adults to upload photographed documents through their phone, or provide a computer in the school office that adults can use for enrollment. Find ways to mitigate some adult enrollment stress and ultimately get the child in the classroom as soon as possible.

Create a welcome binder or folder of paperwork for kinship families. Consider that paper forms may be more helpful than electronic forms for some new school families.

Immediately include items that help a family feel enfolded in the spirit of your school. For example, give away 10 free tickets to school events, like sporting events, prom, etc. Offer a list of community resources, or a free school t-shirt and welcome letter. Highlight graduation goals by having credits-needed-to-graduate information available or a photo backdrop for a graduation destination picture.

Take time to continuously improve your school's enrollment process. Keep track of common hurdles families encounter, to inform possible changes to your systems or technology. After the enrollment process, ask families what they found easy and/or challenging, and then see how you can improve the process for future families.



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School Climate

There is no typical combination of people in families. One of the best things we can do for children is to welcome them and their family “as is” into the school environment. Every family is special, and every family can raise healthy, happy children.

In order to be welcoming, we must be self and team-reflective about our common language and the environmental cues that children and their caregivers experience. Here are examples of ways we can build more supportive environments.

Kinship Champions - Each school building (or district) can designate a go-to person as a point-of-contact for kinship caregivers and students living with kin. This person should be offered time to attend professional development opportunities on kinship to enhance their role in supporting kinship families. Their identity should be shared at enrollment, in newsletters and on websites.

“It is so important to have that one “point of contact” person that acts as the liaison until fully transitioned and relationships have developed.”

– Lillian McCree, grandmother,
“Mom,” to Tabby Perry

Special Events - Rather than name events that marginalize kinship families, like Muffins with Mom or Donuts with Dad, consider options like Breakfast with my Special Person or alternate non-othering occasion names.

PTO/PTA - Invite people both broadly and specifically to participate in school-serving organizations. A flyer is nice, but taking the time to call a kinship grandparent, for instance, would go a long way toward make them feel included. Remember the mental bandwidth strain mentioned earlier: A kinship family adult might not realize that they could be part of the PTO if they desire. Even if they decline, you just built relationship capital by making the phone call.

“A personal call is always welcomed because being a kinship caregiver can be isolating.”

– Lillian McCree, grandmother,
“Mom,” to Tabby Perry



Image by freepik

Protective Factors - Children are more connected to school when they participate in extracurricular activities. Remember to invite kinship children to play sports or attend after-school clubs. Ask caregivers if they have any questions about how to sign up.

Space - If a parent needs a space or Wi-Fi connection to conduct a tele-health, therapy or tele-psychiatry appointment, can you offer a conference room for them and/or their child? If certain appointments can be done onsite, the student can get back to class efficiently.

Health Appointments - Does your school have a health clinic, school health center, or nearby health department that can see students or families? Make sure that information is shared regularly.

Attendance - Talk with families about the importance of attendance while using “we want you here” language. Attendance Works has videos and handouts that you can use in parent meetings throughout the school year.

Handle with Care - Work with your local law enforcement to create a Handle with Care network. This means that if police officers go to a home with a crisis and they know the child goes to your school, they will send an email or call your designated person to let them know to handle the child with care the next day.

Tech Support - Not all families can afford quality Wi-Fi. Consider a system that helps children have access to Wi-Fi hotspots or other technology needs.

Legal Buses - The Justice Mobile and Ohio Justice Bus travel around the state to help families with pro bono needs. Follow their websites or Instagram to see when and where they will be in your area.

Small Groups - Schools can be a good place to host small support groups or parent cafes for kinship families. Actively create space so that family members know they are not alone and can build relationships and support networks with other adults.

Relevant Policies

Familiarize yourself with policies that impact families, young people, and children in your school system. Seek to continuously learn or ask school administrators for assistance.

The [McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#) may or may not impact kinship families, depending on their situation. Consider McKinney Vento for funds to cover things like transportation to and from school for a specific time period. Know who your school's liaison is for families experiencing homelessness.

[Title I](#) is part of the Every Child Succeeds Act ([ESSA](#)), which helps schools pay for additional academic resources in low-income areas.

Children in foster care are eligible for [USDA Free and Reduced lunches](#). Keep in mind that TANF-eligible students are eligible for the program, and OWF-Child Only benefits (TANF) are not based on the income of the family. Even informal kinship children may receive or be eligible to receive OWF-Child Only benefits. Check with your school regarding additional support to help kinship care families gain access to free and reduced lunch. Some states specifically include kinship in this allowance.

Children in kinship or foster care can benefit from an [Early Education Grant](#) to help pay for preschool. Assist families in identifying ways to offset costs to support children to attend preschool. Preschool participation is one of the best predictors of kindergarten-ready children.

Many [HeadStart](#) programs have established criteria that award extra points to applications for families that have been referred by a school, and some also add points if the parent/guardian has a debilitating health condition (a common issue for older caregivers). Discuss which factors might help support a kinship family's application with your county's local program.

As a school employee, you are a [mandated reporter](#). This means that you are required to call your public children services agency if you observe or hear that a child is being harmed or neglected. Your school counselor, social worker, principal, or other helping professionals can train you about what to do if a call needs to be made. By law, mandated reporters should also receive a follow-up from the agency on the status of the investigation and at closure of the investigation, as well as the name of the contact person at the agency for follow up.



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Helpful Programs

[Ohio Kinship and Adoption Navigator](#) (OhioKAN) is an organization that you or family members can call to talk about your unique situation. Connecting with a representative is free. They can help a caregiver find resources and kinship-specific benefits and create a personalized plan to support children and caregivers in kinship or adoptive care. Call 1-844-644-6526 Monday through Friday 8:30am to 6:30pm.

[Kinnect](#) is an Ohio-based nonprofit dedicated to ensuring permanent families for children in the shortest amount of time as possible. In addition to implementing OhioKAN, Kinnect leads multiple other programs including a Kinnect to Family, Safe Affirmed Youth, Youth Centered Permanency Roundtables and the Youth Navigator Network.

[Youth Navigator Network](#) (YNN) is specifically available for youth and young adults up to 21 years of age who are currently in out-of-home care, have had an open case with children services within 24 months, or have aged out of care. The program helps youth navigate systems, access resources, and expand their network of connections and supports.

The [Ohio School Wellness Initiative](#) (OSWI) was designed to explore, implement, and sustain a full continuum of care, including prevention, early intervention, and treatment practices for K-12 students in schools that adopt a Student Assistance Program (SAP) model. Having a strong SAP in your school or district can be an important component of serving all families well, including kinship, foster, and adoptive families. For more information, contact the SBCOE at 513-529-2450.

For kinship caregivers seeking information on supporting an LGBTQIA+ youth in their care, The Trevor Project, an organization working to create a more inclusive world for LGBTQIA+ youth, offers an [information page](#) with a variety of resource options.



Image by freepik

Works Cited

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GRANDFACTS. Grandfamilies.org. Retrieved February 26, 2024, from https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Ohio%20Fact%20Sheet%202022%20Update.pdf?ver=s9Ux_mNUqvGqbYQEHQjKSQ%3d%3d

OhioKAN (2024, January). Tableau CQI Dashboard. In Family Characteristics. SACWIS.

OhioKAN (2024, January). Tableau CQI Dashboard. In Adult Demographics. SACWIS.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. (2018, June 1). Working With Kinship Caregivers. Child Welfare Information Gateway. Retrieved February 26, 2024, from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/kinship/>

What Are ACEs? And How Do They Relate to Toxic Stress? Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Retrieved February 26, 2024, from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/>

Empathy Building Book List

Below is a sampling of books that you might find useful in building your awareness and understanding of the kinship experience, as well as in assisting with how to care for yourself while caring for others. Sometimes school staff form professional development book clubs.

The Kinship Parenting Toolbox by Kim Phagan-Hansel

A Grandfamily for Sullivan: Coping Skills for Kinship Care Families by Beth Winkler Tyson

We Are Family: The Modern Transformation of Parents and Children by Susan Golombok

Missing Daddy by Mariame Kaba

Maid by Stephanie Land

Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver

Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators by Elena Aguilar

Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide for Caring for Self While Caring for Others by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky & Connie Burk

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle by Emily Nagoski & Amelia Nagoski

Additional References & More Links

Kinship Care Global Review Guide
<https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Kinship-Care-Global-Review-Final.pdf>

Definitions
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/kinship.pdf>
<https://jfs.ohio.gov/PFOF/PDF/ProtectOHIO-Kinship-Intervention-Manual.stm>

Kinship Versus Foster Care
<https://fosterandadopt.jfs.ohio.gov/kinship-care/resources-for-kinship-caregivers/kinship-vs-foster-care>

Kinship PDFS
<https://jfs.ohio.gov/search/?q=kinship>

Federal Kinship information
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/kinship/>

Annie E. Casey What is Kinship Care?
<https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-is-kinship-care>

Kinship DATA
<https://www.aecf.org/resources/2022-kids-count-data-book>

Ohio DATA
<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data?location=OH#OH/2/0/char/0>

Ohio Department of Education office of supports for children experiencing homelessness
<https://profiles.nche.seiservices.com/StateProfile.aspx?StateID=41>

Ohio Resource Guide for Relatives Caring for Children
<http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/num/JFS%2008146/pdf/>

Kinship Permanency Incentive Program (KPI)
https://jfs.ohio.gov/ocf/kinship_care.stm

Factsheet for Families
https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_kinshi.pdf

ODE Documents
<https://education.ohio.gov/Miscellaneous/Search-Results?q=kinship>

ESSA
<https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Foster-Care/Funding-Services-for-Students-in-Foster-Care>

What children need to navigate their world
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4810026/>

Ohio's Department of Children & Youth has guides for those seeking to understand custody types and benefits available to kinship families. Search "Kinship" forms or publication numbers 08072, 08073, 08145, and 08146 using this link:
<https://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/>

Contact Information

This guide was created in collaboration by OhioKAN KinFirst Manager Jo Ellen Simonsen and the Ohio School-Based Center of Excellence for Prevention & Early Intervention Content Specialist Glenna Edwards with design by Justin Tyler.



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thank you