



**Peer-to-Peer
Support Service**



Support Group Leader: Handbook

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Welcome to the Kinship family

Hello and welcome to this **Kinship handbook**. We hope you'll find it a useful guide to dip in and out of on your journey as a peer Support Group Leader.

If you're reading this, it's because you're doing something special. You're giving up your time to help other kinship carers. And as you're a kinship carer yourself we know what this commitment means.

A warm welcome from us is important. We want you to feel supported and held in your journey. It's **key that you feel you have the tools** to set up a group and to make it work for you.

You'll be building your support group in your local community. It **must be a group** that **makes sense to you** and the other kinship carers who join.

We'll be honest - sometimes it might feel hard. People are complex. As a kinship carer your life might feel even more challenging at times. That's ok. You need to be kind to yourself.

So, what you'll be able to read here will help you. Our **friendly Kinship staff** will also be here for you. They'll help you to get the **training** and **support you need** to make your kinship group a success.

Who is this handbook for and what does it include?

We've created this handbook for kinship carers who want to set up a peer support group. This could be in your **local area** or **even online**.

If you're setting up a group, we'll call you a **Support Group Leader**.

We want this handbook to be able to answer the questions you might have if you're setting up a group for the first time. If you have set up one already, this will be a handy reference for you to check.

We know a lot goes into setting up a group – from finding other kinship carers to attend to finding a venue to meet in.

You'll find practical support, tips and some examples of what other groups have found useful.

You'll see that we've broken it down into sections, which makes it easier to find what you're looking for at a glance. We've written it based on all the work we've done with kinship carers over the last 10 years.

This **handbook** will always be a **work in progress** resource. We want you to be able to feedback and let us know what works and what doesn't. What might be missing and tips that you've used that we could include to share with other kinship carers.

Please share any feedback to your Volunteer Coordinator or send us a quick email at peersupport@kinship.org.uk

About Kinship and how we can support you

Before we get into all the detail about peer support groups, we wanted to tell you a bit about us as a charity and how we'll support you in your journey as a **Support Group Leader**.

We are the **leading kinship care charity** in England and Wales. We offer kinship carers like you the **financial, legal, practical** and **emotional support** from the moment you need it, for as long as you need it. We support all kinship carers regardless of their status.

At the end of the handbook, you can find more information about our services and other useful organisations.

Kinship values

At Kinship, we've thought a lot about our values and what makes us special as a charity. **Simply put – it's you.** The amazing kinship carers looking after, loving, and caring for hundreds of thousands of children. Making daily sacrifices willingly.

Our values are inspired by you. They're part of what we do every day and how we work. They are the values we see in each and every one of you.

We're inspired by kinship carers to:

- **Put people first**
We care about each other and create spaces where people feel they belong and can thrive
- **Be bold**
We fight for what's right with focus and determination
- **Step up**
We all take responsibility for changing lives and changing the system
- **Be stronger together**
We see the bigger picture of our work and value collaboration to drive impact

We use these values to work in partnership with other organisations. We also use them to challenge when necessary. **To make sure kinship carers voices are heard.**

Volunteer agreements at Kinship

By joining us as a volunteer you'll become part of a growing team dedicated to ensuring kinship carers receive recognition and support.

To help you get the most out of your volunteering experience **we've set out what you can expect from us and what we hope you will contribute to our volunteer agreement.**

This includes things like how Kinship will provide clear details about your role and what it involves, provide you with a named contact so you know who to go to if you have any questions or concerns and provide regular opportunities for support and supervision, relevant to your volunteering role.

It also includes **the things that Kinship asks of you**, like asking you to carry out all aspects of the role reliably to the best of your ability, read, understand, and follow Kinship policies and procedures as laid out in the Volunteer Handbook and take part in any training, meetings, support, and supervision sessions required of your role.

Your power, your community

As your group develops, you get to know each other and share your experiences you might start to think about what you want to change for other kinship carers. So that they don't have to go through what you've gone through.

We know that being a kinship carer is tough. We know that there is a **postcode lottery for support**. And that some kinship carers get more support others.

At Kinship, we're campaigning to change this and we're helping kinship carers to get their voice heard at **local, regional and national level**. We know that together you are powerful. In 2022, we will be rolling out a national campaign to raise awareness of kinship care and push for better rights and services.

Setting up and running a support group is a lot of work, so we're not asking you to start campaigning. But, we are letting you know that this is also what we do and if you'd like to get involved with campaigning with us, we can help you.

How we'll support you to set up your group

Our Peer Support Service was set up in **January 2022** to help kinship carers set up their own kinship groups. We have a brilliant team across England who **will help you** to set up your group. These are our **Volunteer Coordinators**.

Introducing our Volunteer Coordinators

Our Coordinators will give you practical training, help you to find a free venue, give you tips and tools you can use as well, as helping to promote your group to other kinship carers.

They'll be there at the beginning to **make sure you feel confident leading the group**. They will be there if there is a bump in the road to help you get back on track.

Their role is to help you make your group your own. They're not here to lead your group. They're there to give you **guidance, training and support** while you get into the swing of things.

You might want a group that meets every week in a coffee shop for a chat, or you might want a place where you can discuss things that might be a bit more sensitive. They'll help you understand what type of venue might work best for your needs.

Groups will be made up of lots of different types of people but all with kinship care in common. Sometimes people disagree, so our Coordinator will support you with training to manage conversations and how to have those difficult chats.

Our ultimate aim is to get you set up, ensure you are happy and confident to lead your group and then leave you to it.

You'll still be able to access all our online resources, meet other group leaders and access our advice and free workshops but we want this to be **your group**.

How to work with your Coordinator:

Contact your Volunteer Coordinator with any questions and problems. Ideally, we'd suggest **speaking with your Coordinator at least once a month**, probably a bit more as your group is first set up.

This is important as support groups can be emotionally demanding. Your Coordinator will make time to check in with you regularly. We'll make sure these are set up in advance so you can plan your time.

Things you might chat about with your Coordinator:

- How many people came to group?
- Were there any difficult conversations in group?
- Do you have any worries about how group is going?
- Is there some training or information that might help?
- My venue isn't working – what can I do?

Support Groups

So, what is peer support?

Peer support is where you share **your stories** and **experience** with people who are in the same boat as you. You're building a connection and a relationship to support each other – through the good times and the not so good.

Peer support is something that people do **together**. Sometimes one person might feel like they're giving or sharing with someone, and another time, they might feel like they're being supported by them. It is this '**doing peer support together**' that people find rewarding.

If you're a kinship carer we know that your experience can be a roller coaster. We also know that you become a kinship carer out of love.

At Kinship we offer **three** different types of **peer support**:

1. Our **Peer Support Groups** that create a welcoming and supportive space to come together to share experiences.
2. Our **Someone Like Me** service is a telephone service. Kinship carers are matched to other trained volunteer kinship carers.
3. Our **Online Chat**, where kinship carers can reach out to trained kinship carer volunteers to get emotional support (coming soon!)

What's a peer support group?

Kinship groups provide vital support for kinship carers in their local area, or online. **Built on trust and friendships**, groups are a safe and supportive space where kinship carers can come together and connect with others who have **similar experiences**.

Our groups are run by volunteers supported by Kinship. Most of our incredible volunteers are kinship carers themselves or have been before.

Kinship carers often tell us that the support they get from attending support groups is life changing. It can help reduce the loneliness and stigma experienced by many kinship carers.

“When I went to the group I was amazed. I heard stories that I could relate to. Everyone was so lovely – I didn’t feel judged. I found the help and support I needed and now I go every week”

Debbie, West Yorkshire (Special Guardian for her grandson)

Kinship groups represent kinship carers at a local level or with an additional shared connection. They raise awareness of kinship care, sometimes campaigning for better support and provide valuable help to kinship carers in the community.

They help create a society in which kinship carers and the children they care for are recognised, valued and supported.

Types of support group

There are lots of different types of support groups running all over England and Wales and some groups are a mixture of types. These could include:

- **Coffee morning groups** where kinship carers meet on a regular basis to talk and relax.
- **Confidential groups** where carers meet in a secure space (with a closed door) to talk about challenging situations they’re experiencing as a kinship carer.
- **Walk and talk groups** where a group meets in a local outdoor area such as a park to enjoy fresh air and some gentle exercise.
- **Information sessions** where a speaker attends to provide training or a presentation on an issue of choice, such as school attendance, special educational needs or online safety for children.
- **Online groups** using video calling such as zoom. These allow those who are unable to travel to join a group or connect with others that share a more specific characteristic, for example, sibling carers or single carers.

There’s no right or wrong way to run your group. You might want a mix – a weekly meeting in a coffee shop and then once a month in a more confidential setting to talk about more serious things.

Setting up a group - where to start?

In most cases it is good for groups to have at least two volunteers. It means that the group can still carry on even when the leader is ill or away. It also means that one person isn’t taking on too much. **A group needs to run safely and be sustainable.** We know when a group first starts this isn’t always possible, but it’s something to keep in mind as your group grows.

Definition of sustainable – be able to keep on going.

A sustainable group is one that has the tools to grow and solve its own problems.

Who is the group for?

You might have a very clear idea who your group is for, or you may want to see how you go as you get set up. Either way, you need to think about **what things are important for your group**.

Your members should be kinship carers but what about other characteristics might you want to include? For example do you want to run your group for all kinship carers or perhaps:

- Kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order?
- Friends and family foster carer?
- Have a residence order?
- Do you want to have a group just for male kinship carers?

Are you someone who'd love to set up a group for kinship carers who:

- Are part of the LGBT+ community
- Are Black, Asian or part of a minority ethnic group
- Have a disability

You can also make clear who your group isn't for. You might want to say that it would be inappropriate for:

- Birth parents
- Children under the age of 18
- Professionals in social care services
- Women (because your group is a space for men to talk)
- Men (because your group is a space for women to talk)

When you're setting up your group it is also important to consider:

- LGBT+ - we will be welcoming and inclusive?
- Disability – we will meet somewhere that is accessible?
- Age – anyone over the age of 18 can join
- Culture – we welcome people from all communities (unless you are running a culturally specific group)

This activity could be done again as your group grows to make sure it's still meeting the needs of its members. **As a Support Group Leader, you will represent the members along with any other volunteers supporting you**, so it's important to speak with them and find out what they want from the group.

Creating a safe space

The aim of peer support is to create a safe space. We know that feeling safe within peer support is important. If members don't feel safe, they won't share their experiences and engage with the support others can offer. If people don't feel safe in peer support, they won't use it.

Ways of creating a safe space include:

- Creating guidelines about things like confidentiality and how your group members behave respectfully towards each other
- Checking meeting locations for privacy and accessibility
- Role modelling the way the members can share (or not share) and working out how they can discuss particular topics (for example, the level of detail they might give about trauma may be limited)
- That ***'what is shared in peer support, remains in peer support'***. This helps to create trust that allows people to express themselves without fear of judgement.
- Inclusivity

In some forms of peer support, the responsibility for ensuring ground rules are followed may rest with online moderators, group facilitators, or supervisors. In other forms of peer support, **everyone takes responsibility** for creating a safe space.

Kinship is committed to welcoming people from different backgrounds and abilities to all groups. We know that discrimination can take many forms.

You must not treat a person less favourably because of one or more of these:

- Age
- Sex
- Marital status
- Ethnic origin
- Nationality
- Sexual orientation
- Trans-status
- Political beliefs
- HIV/AIDS status
- Adaptable needs
- Religion

If you're not sure how to support someone with a particular need, get in touch with your Volunteer Coordinator.

Choice and control

What does this mean? It means your **members should be able to choose how they join in with the group**. This means that they can decide:

- When they attend or take part
- How often they attend
- What they choose to share
- What role they take in a group
- How long they stay in peer support

They should feel they can leave the group for a time and then come back later, as well as be able to miss meetings or leave a session early. It's important that they can do this without feeling like they're wrong to do so.

We know life can change, especially when you're looking after children. One day is never the same.

Members should feel like they are an important part of the group and be a part of important decisions, such as working together to agree guidelines about behaviour. Also, deciding things like if the time or venue of the group should change.

Things to consider include:

- Do people feel able to dip in and out of peer support?
- Is it okay for someone to listen in group and not to say anything?
- Are members able to decide how the peer support is run?
- Could you create a way to provide feedback? This could be anonymously or in a way that doesn't require talking with the whole group, such as a suggestion box or talking one-to-one with the group leader.

Your Volunteer Coordinator can talk to you about training to help you think about boundaries (what we feel comfortable sharing, and what we don't).

"It's really exciting, we have had lots of support in setting up a local support group and this is going really well. We meet each Friday. The others (who attend) are all kinship carers and it's really helped us to understand what's going on. We get a lot out of the network because it's talking to people about experiences."

(Kinship carer)

Freedom to be yourself

How can you create an environment that people feel comfortable and happy?

Remember that while kinship carers coming to group may have many similar experiences, these experiences will not be exactly the same. **Recognising, respecting, and valuing** those differences alongside the things that people have in common is important.

Peer support involves people sharing their own life experiences and listening to others sharing theirs. When people feel comfortable to share experiences with each other they build trust. These supportive, trusting relationships form the friendships and connections that people make in peer support.

Equally, being listened to with **understanding, empathy** and **attention** can be a powerful experience.

Within a support group people don't have to pretend that they are okay. It **can be a relief** for someone to be able to say that they're not coping or that they don't know what to do.

How do you build trust in your group?

How do we balance someone's right to speak with the wishes and feelings of others?

How do we show that others are respected?

There are a number of things you can do to create a safe space for your members:

- Create a space where people listen to others and respect their experiences
- Create a space where people don't judge about what has happened in the past or what they are experiencing

What might stop someone being themselves and how can you overcome these?

- Too many people in the room. So, it might be time to find a larger venue or split into smaller groups
- Attending groups for the first time they might feel anxious. You could meet them early or have a phone call to introduce yourself.
- Someone is unable to climb stairs so feeling excluded. You could look for a venue which is easily accessible.

Your role as Support Group Leader

As a support group leader your role will be to **oversee the running of the group**. In addition to promoting the group and recruiting new members, you will also be responsible for deciding on the **structure of your group** and keeping the group going over time.

Focus

A group can take many different forms, and each will look very different. It might be meeting together to socialise in a public cafe, meeting in a confidential space to share experiences or meeting to do an activity together, such as fishing or gardening. Some groups might be a mixture of some different elements or change as they get going and new members join.

The term focus describes what people actually do when they come to the group. The focus will depend on what suits your members best.

Socialising

This is where you can informally socialise with the members. Maybe have a chat over a cup of tea. It allows people to come together with others who have similar experiences of kinship care without pushing the need for active sharing of those experiences. Social groups can reduce isolation and provide an opportunity for meeting others without the pressure to share difficult situations.

Doing an activity

Peer support with an activity focus brings people together by involving them in an activity they can do together. This can include a wide range of activities such as:

- Gardening
- Walking
- Cooking
- Knitting
- Fishing
- Different outings (for example, going to the cinema).

Activity-based peer support provides a really nice space for sharing personal experience.

Going to an activity can take the pressure off. It can be easier to have a chat with people you might not know that well. Some kinship carers might want to connect with other kinship carers but feel a bit anxious about it. Something that might be a hobby they'd like to do, might help reduce that nervousness.

Learning together

We all know that having the right information helps us make better decisions. We also know that some of the things you're coming up against as a kinship carer are tough.

So, you might want to invite a guest speaker to your group who will talk about things that will help you. This could be a speaker on wellbeing. It could be someone who talks about teenagers and managing their behaviour. Learning can take place face-to-face or online.

Remember we also have our **free workshops** you can attend – either as individuals or as a group. <https://kinshippeersupport.org.uk/workshops/>

When and where

If your group is going to meet face-to-face (rather than online in a virtual meeting) it should be somewhere that people can **access easily, enjoy coming to and must be welcoming**.

If you are meeting in person, there are lots of places that will offer you a room for free. If you can't find a venue, please speak with your Coordinator who will support you in your search.

Free/low-cost venues

- Sure Start centres
- Community Centres
- Libraries
- School halls
- Town Halls
- Sports Centres
- Coffee shops/Supermarket cafes
- Council meetings rooms

You'll need to think about **whether your venue is suitable for your group**. Here are some questions and tips to think about:

- If you are meeting in a public place, like a cafe, how accessible it is for anyone with limited mobility?
- Is there space for a wheelchair, and are there any steps that someone with a walking stick might struggle with?
- To be as inclusive as possible venues serving alcohol should not be routinely used. But if all members are in agreement, then they could use for special events
- Think about whether a venue like a church hall might make some kinship carers feel less welcome. Not everyone has a faith they follow so could feel uncomfortable in a faith-based venue
- Is there anything you would need to consider if you were doing a Walk and Talk group?
- Consider the distance and route to allow all members to easily join in.

- Be aware of the weather and change plans if you need to. Do your group need reminding to bring things like a bottle of water and sunscreen?

We have designed a **checklist** below which can help and it includes some things to think about.

Venue checklist:

Venue address including postcode:	
Date of completion (the date you create the checklist):	
Review date this document should be reviewed every 12 months:	
Checklist completed by (name of the person completing):	

Venue contact details:	
Venue contact phone number(s):	
Venue contact email(s):	

Does the venue have a car park?	Yes/No
If not where is nearest parking?	
Is the venue on public transport routes?	Yes/No
Please give details such as bus routes	
Is the venue accessible?	Yes/no
Give details of any ramps/ Lifts, unavoidable stairs etc	
Are there toilets available?	
Is there an accessible toilet?	Yes/No
Any other useful information	

Using the venue:

Give details of arrangements for keys or entry codes (if needed):	
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Is there a kitchen for making refreshments?	Yes/no	Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree arrangements among group for bringing refreshments and clearing up
Please note any concerns about kitchen use eg hygiene, access		Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report any concerns to venue management
Is there a clear fire procedure including raising alarm, evacuation routes and assembly points?	Yes/No	Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure Fire Procedure is understood and shared at start of each group
Is there a first aider on site or first aid kit available?	Yes/no	Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure all group members know that first aid remains individual responsibility
Is furniture set out ready?	Yes/no	Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all moving and handling is done within individual's capability

If you would like to run a virtual group, please contact your **Volunteer Coordinator** who will be able to provide you with some additional guidance and resources to help you.

Time

People may find it difficult to attend group at certain times of the day.

For example, groups that start before 10am and finish after 2pm may not be accessible for kinship carers who are **restricted by school runs**. For this reason, many groups start between 10am and 12 noon. This is something you could talk to your members about to see what fits best for most people.

Try to see what else is going on in your community. **Try not to clash with other popular activities** in the area such as regular get-togethers in the community hall.

You could consider running on different days when you meet to extend the range of choice available, but this can sometimes be confusing.

If you run a group outside of normal working hours (evenings or weekends) your Volunteer Coordinator will not be working.

If there is something you need to talk to them about you should contact them on their return to work or leave them an answerphone message, WhatsApp or email and they will contact you as soon as they can.

If there is an **urgent safeguarding matter** you should contact the [NSPCC](#) or the Police for support.

How often

It is up to you how often you would like the group to meet. Most groups meet at least once a month but you could run weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

You will need to ensure you have the time to attend group and keep up with any admin you need to do.

Choosing a name

It is important to choose a name that reflects where you are based and what you are doing so that kinship carers can easily find the group and quickly see if it's what they are looking for.

Examples are:

[Place/location] Kinship Group – [who it is for if you want it to be for a specific group]

Examples include:

- Newquay Kinship Group
- Birmingham Kinship Group – Grandparents over 60
- Brighton Kinship Group – LGBT+

Check online when thinking about a name to make sure it isn't already being used by someone else. Your Volunteer Coordinator can help and check that it meets some Kinship guides.

When you've decided on what your group should be called and when and where it will run, your Volunteer Coordinator will send you a form to fill in. The form will ask for details about your group so Kinship can include it on our website to help you promote the group.

Tools and tips to starting your group

A warm welcome

Your group should be a safe space for kinship carers to connect, so a warm welcome is really important.

Some people might be nervous to join a group for the first time. They might not be sure what to expect. Thinking about things like having a quick phone call before with a new joiner, might really put them at ease. You could talk about what the group feels like and what you chat about. Simple things to reassure someone go a long way.

The first time you bring a group together, you probably won't know each other so it could feel a little bit awkward. That's ok and very natural. Everyone will be feeling the same.

The first group will be about getting to know each other and sharing your experiences. You all have kinship care in common but some of your experiences might be very different.

Things you could think about:

- **Be curious** – find out about each other – how many children are they caring for? How long have they been a kinship carer?
- **Greet each person** as people arrive, especially if it's their first time
- If you're in a room with tea and coffee, have a chat with people while you're making a brew
- If someone is on their own, try and bring them into a group
- **If someone is late to the group**, try and bring them in, things happen, especially when you're caring for children
- Use the **conversation starters below**

Conversation starters

It's important to let the group flow as much as possible rather than following a rigid agenda, but there could be times when conversation may slow down or stop completely.

As a group leader it is your role to move things on and having some conversation starters under your belt is a **great way to avoid uncomfortable silences**. They could include:

- How's your week been?
- Have you seen the recent update from Kinship on their website?
- Has anyone seen anything good on TV recently?
- Is anyone reading a good book they could recommend?
- Have you got any plans this weekend?
- What kind of training did you do when you became a kinship carer?
- What kind of training did you do in your role as?
- Have you heard about/done anything about:
 - Looking after children with ACE's (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
 - First aid
 - Attachment disorders
 - Parenting skills
 - Internet safety
 - Young people's mental health

Lots of these topics will be relevant to most carers at some point and any answers will likely help others, as well as helping people get to know each other and forming friendships within the group.

Icebreakers

What's an icebreaker?

Definition: An **icebreaker** is an activity or game designed to welcome people and warm-up the conversation when they come together.

Examples:

Toilet Paper Icebreaker

To play, pass a roll of toilet paper around and ask everyone rip off how much they would usually use. Everyone will probably be quite confused!

When the toilet paper makes it all the way around the circle, have everyone count their squares. The number of squares each person took is the number of fun facts they have to reveal about themselves.

Mindfulness Icebreaker

If meeting attendees are feel stressed, especially about the meeting itself, then they might not be able to concentrate on anything else. You could reduce stress by starting the meeting with a mindfulness icebreaker.

Start with three minutes of silent contemplation, and then have everyone write down what is causing the stress. When everyone finishes writing, tell them to rip up their stress. Put all the scraps together in a bowl on the table. They have been shared but those thoughts are no longer the focus.

The No Smiling Icebreaker

Tell everyone they can't smile during the first five minutes of the meeting. You'll be amazed at how humorous some people become when they're told not to smile.

Relaxation activity

This short activity shows how to use relaxation techniques when things feel a bit hectic or noisy.

Explain that some situations, or lots of noise and activity, can make people feel worried or tense. It is important to recognise when they feel like this, they need to do something about it.

Ask the group what they do when they feel stressed, anxious or angry. For example, at home do they find a quiet space in their room or in the garden? Find out from each person where they go when they need to relax or have some quiet time. Ask whether other people leave them in peace when they go somewhere quiet to try to relax.

You could ask people whether they have a way of indicating to others that they are trying to relax and would like not to be disturbed. You could suggest ideas such as having a sign on their bedroom door.

Move on to discuss ways of managing stress through breathing.

Ask people to:

- Sit comfortably, relax their body and close their eyes
- Put one hand on the top half of their chest and feel themselves breathing in and out for a few minutes

- After this, put their hand on their lower chest and try to take deeper/bigger breaths so that they can feel their hand moving
- Continue to take deep slow breaths for a few minutes
- If people find this deep breathing difficult, you could suggest instead that they focus on where their feet or hands are resting and just relax thinking about this.
- Afterwards ask how it felt to do the breathing or focusing on their hands/feet. Explain that it usually gets easier to relax the more often you do it

Creating a Group Agreement

A group agreement will include things that will help people feel comfortable and safe in the group. It is a declaration of the rules that you and your members have agreed to put in place to **help the group run well and allow everyone to feel confident to speak openly**.

The group agreement is something that you and the group members should **work together on** so everyone feels like they own it. It can be changed and should be kept relevant and reviewed regularly.

Questions you can ask to create your agreement:

- What does a group need to feel safe and comfortable?
- How can we make people feel comfortable dipping in and out of group?
- What does confidential mean?
- Is what we discuss in group confidential?
- How can we get feedback from group members without them having to speak out in the group?

Here's an example of an agreement with is taken from [MINDs toolkit](#):

Confidentiality

- Only share what you personally feel comfortable sharing
- What is said in group - stays in group. Don't share personal information about others discussed within the group without permission. We will only share information or details of what is said in group if there are safeguarding concerns
- Safeguarding is everyone's concern. If anyone has any concerns about the safety of a child or adult, they must bring it to the Group Leader's attention immediately.

Communication

- Try to understand the perspective and experiences of others in the group
- Everybody has the right to speak and have an opinion
- Try not to monopolise (take over) the discussion
- Listen carefully to what others have to say
- Be non-judgemental and respectful of each other
- Be careful of the words you choose. Avoid using disrespectful language
- Share ideas with others

Respect

- Respect people's boundaries
- Promote a relaxed feeling in group – no raised voices or arguments
- Allow people to be themselves

Conduct

- Take time out if you need to
- Challenge discriminatory or oppressive behaviour
- Place your mobile on quiet or vibrate. We understand that you may receive important calls about your child(ren) but please try to avoid disruption the group and leave the room if you receive a call
- All data will be stored safely and not shared unless express consent is given
- The group is open to all individuals regardless of their gender, age, race, cultural or ethnic origin

How to promote your group

When a group is new you might not have many kinship carers attending. **That's ok!** It is important not to be discouraged and to continue to meet as scheduled. Kinship carers in the community need to find out about the group and see that the group continues to meet.

The success of a group is not based on how many people attend, but on the relationships that develop and the support that is provided.

Here's some easy ways to promote your group:

- **Local library/local cafe** – pop a poster on a notice board. They might offer a meeting room too!
- **Social workers/local authority** - would they be interested in promoting the group with carers they know? They might know of free local venues too
- **Other kinship carer groups** – you could collaborate to make sure your groups are complimenting each other or share on kinship Facebook groups
- **Other support groups** (e.g. Al-Anon groups) – they may be able to come along and talk to your group, help promote the group amongst their attendees or provide any advice on free venues
- **Local Council for Voluntary Services (CVS)** – they could list the group on their website or offer a free room
- **National organisations** – they may be able to provide you with literature to have at the group and help with signposting
- **Your local MP** - they could support the group on social media and maybe influence the council to provide a free space for the group to meet

What can Kinship do?

- Kinship can support you by providing you with leaflet and poster templates and help you edit these for your group
- Kinship can support you with printing materials if helpful for outreach
- Make sure your group is listed on the Kinship website so other carers can find it
- Your volunteer coordinator can help you find and reach out to venues and groups/organisations that might be able to support the group
- Your volunteer coordinator can provide you with contact information for other peer support groups nearby (if any)
- Support you to use social media to promote your group safely

Where can you put your posters?

- Local library
- Your Local Authority
- Nearby Cafes
- Your local MP can help share
- Local Community or voluntary groups
- Local schools

Why do people attend?

Building in time to socialise with other members is extremely important at group meetings and can lead to lasting friendships.

Creating a balance between speakers, presentations or activities (if your group decides they would like these) and time for people to sit down and have a chat is key to a successful meeting.

Everyone likes to feel that they are involved in the meetings and have some control over what goes into the schedule, so talk with your members about what they'd like to see or do during the meetings.

Regular check-ins are a great way to ensure group members are getting what they hoped to in attending the group. This could be done by either having a conversation to see how people are feeling about the group or if there were something they would like more.

If people don't feel comfortable speaking out, then maybe a poll can be created where people write down ideas without sharing their name, and put them in a box which can be read out. Some ideas that come from these polls could include things like a change of venue, holding the group at a different time, a change of format, suggesting a speaker, requesting some training or comments on the way group is run.

Every group will run differently and you need to find the best fit for you and your group. Don't be disheartened if the numbers attending your group fluctuate as this can be for a whole range of reasons.

If you are **worried about low attendance** then please contact us and we'll see if we can help with additional promotion of your group or a chat about what is working well and what could be better.

“This has made a massive difference to me, being able to go to the group, and to just sit and share your story with others in the same situation, has been a lifeline for me.”

(Kinship carer)

How to handle difficult situations

In this section we will look at

- Group dynamics
- Personal boundaries and self-care
- Giving advice
- How to support someone who is distressed
- Managing difficult situations

Group dynamics

Groups go through stages of development as time goes on and it is useful to understand this process when setting them up. This knowledge of group dynamics can help you understand some of the behaviour's groups are experiencing and remember that the process is normal.

Bruce Tuckman was a psychologist who came up with the stages of group development. He believed that groups go through four stages: forming, storming, norming and performing:

- **Forming** is the first stage, the very beginning of a group when the group is coming together and everyone is getting to know each other and boundaries are agreed.
- **Storming** is when the group has gotten to know each other well however there becomes conflict within the group and the group begins to push against the boundaries. Although this can be a difficult stage for group leaders and facilitators it is important to manage this conflict.
- **Norming** is the stage when the group begins to respect each other's opinions and strengths. However sometimes it can relapse back to the storming phase as new ideas and movements begin to form within the group.
- **Performing** is the end goal for every group, this is the stage where the group has reached a point where everyone in the group are comfortable within its dynamics. At this stage people can join or leave the group and its dynamics will not be affected.

Personal boundaries

Boundaries are about what we feel comfortable with. For example:

- I am comfortable friending someone on Facebook, but not inviting them to my home for dinner
- I feel comfortable sharing that I am a kinship carer, but not about why the children live with me and not their parents

- I am comfortable chatting to someone in the group, but not comfortable with having telephone calls in the evening

Group members should respect boundaries, and no one should feel pressured into sharing anything or committing to anything that they don't want to.

As a group leader you should not encourage support group members to contact you for support outside of the group. This can really impact on your life and create added pressure. Running a group and listening to emotional stories and struggles can be tough. **Make sure you take time to yourself when needed.**

Advice

Kinship carers might attend a group to talk to someone who is understanding of the situation they are in. They might also come to group hoping that you will have the answer to any problems they might be experiencing.

It is important to be caring and understanding listeners, and **signpost** members to the appropriate support. **Remember that you are not a therapist or a qualified advisor** so you should not be giving advice. But you can share your experiences and encourage others to do so. You can approach this by saying things like **“this helped me, it may help you”**.

It's important to emphasise that everyone's experiences may be different.

Some of the things that might get raised in group are:

- How to deal with a child's behaviours
- How to manage contact
- What benefits/allowances are accessible and how to apply
- Who to speak to about getting some advice i.e. Kinship Advice team, Local Authority, Citizens Advice, school, doctor etc

What happens when a group member is upset or worried?

A group may be the first place a kinship carer has attended where they feel people listen to them. And therefore, it can be a very emotional time.

It is important to be sympathetic and listen to the group.

Difficult situations

Occasionally difficult situations may arise during your support group meetings.

Keep calm – managing these situations use skills that Kinship can support you to develop and grow.

Some people may **talk too much**. This can be because they don't like silence or because they get carried away and simply talk too long.

For many kinship carers attending a group, it can be the first opportunity they've had to share their experiences. While there will always be some people who talk more than others it

is the role of the group leader to provide the opportunity for others to have their say too. This is an important skill.

It could be that you jump in and ask if anyone else in the group can relate to what is being said or has any helpful ideas.

You are there for the group, not just one attendee - someone that takes over conversations can stop others attending if they don't find the meetings inclusive or helpful.

Some people **don't talk at all**, or very little. Someone who doesn't join in all the conversations are still benefitting from the meetings. However, if they appear bored or disengaged, you could try to involve them by asking if they can relate to something that was said or if they've ever experienced something similar. Some members **might feel shy and need an invitation to join in**. As the facilitator you can create helpful discussion. Some people may just take time to feel comfortable enough to talk openly so don't worry if not everyone is getting involved all the time.

If someone is **angry** remain calm. Anger can make others feel uncomfortable. It is important that members can express their feelings it should not be disruptive or upsetting to others. Express empathy and understanding for the person's feelings and avoid offering advice to solve the problem. **Often when people are upset they just want someone to listen to them and understand.**

Again, you could ask others in the group if they have been in similar situations and how they handled it. It can be a good idea to suggest moving to one side to speak individually if they are becoming distressed or their anger is causing discomfort to others.

Remember: your safety and the safety of the group members is the most important thing.

Disagreements between your group members should be managed before they escalate. Group members should be allowed to disagree but do so respectfully. If something is said that causes upset or offense it should be addressed straight away.

You could ask someone to rephrase something that might cause disagreement and remind the group that everyone's view is valid. **If discussion becomes heated, you could suggest a break.** You may find it necessary to talk with the member away from the group about how they spoke and suggest other words to use or phrases that help them disagree with respect.

If a member of the group **challenges how you run the group**, take a moment to hear what they're saying. It is important to reflect and consider what is being said. Could you do something differently? By admitting mistakes you are being a good role model for your group.

If a **member is in crisis**, it is likely that they need more help than you can provide in a group. It may be appropriate to give that person some additional time during the meeting if they need it or you could offer to speak with them privately after the meeting.

A support group provides ongoing support and should not provide crisis intervention. If someone is in a difficult situation you can refer them to the **Kinship Advice Service** on **0300 123 7015**, or www.kinship.org.uk/for-kinship-carers/contact-our-advice-service.

There are also lots of local services that could help such as support in managing debt or mental health support. If you are unsure who could be the best person to help refer to your Volunteer Coordinator who can support you in finding the most appropriate support.

Scenario:

What would you do if a heavily intoxicated person came to the group, were swearing and acting aggressively?

Here are some actions that you could take:

- Let carers know its ok to leave the group if they want to
- Take the person to the side and suggest that they come back another day
- (If in a public building) alert the security team or ask a group member to do so discreetly
- Always contact the police if you feel like there is a risk of immediate danger to you or another person
- You should leave if you feel unsafe

Safeguarding

Our Safeguarding Statement:

Safeguarding is everyone's business. Kinship is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare and wellbeing of the adults, children and families we work with. We expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Kinship believes that:

- Everyone has the right to live free from abuse or neglect regardless of age, ability or disability, sex, race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, marital or gender status
- Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and is committed to prevent abuse and neglect through safeguarding the welfare of all adults and children involved

What is safeguarding?

We all have a duty to **safeguard** and **report concerns**.

Safeguarding is not about the process that happens when something goes wrong. It is about:

- **Preventing** people from being abused and neglected and helping them live fulfilled lives
- **Protecting** people who have been abused or neglected.

When we talk about **safeguarding**, we use the following definitions:

- A **concern** is a **feeling** or **worry** about a child or adult's wellbeing or safety that they may be at risk of harm or may have been harmed
- An **incident** is an adverse event, whether actual or alleged, which results in, or risks, significant harm to a child or adult beneficiary, staff member or volunteer whether intentional or unintentional

Safeguarding issues can be a **difficult subject** for staff and volunteers to respond too. Here at Kinship, we are committed to the protection of children and adults at risk from harm and abuse.

Your role in safeguarding

We don't expect you to be experts in safeguarding. Use your instincts, and if something feels uncomfortable or a bit strange, talk to your **Volunteer Coordinator** if it's not an immediate risk. **If it's an immediate risk call the police.**

As part of your training with Kinship we'll ask you to complete an online learning course: NSPCC – Child Protection: an introduction. We'd encourage you to do this because it's an accredited course which gives really good introduction into child protection. You'll also receive a certificate on completion.

It is not your responsibility to deal with suspected abuse, but it is your responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate person.

Make notes

It is important to keep **accurate and detailed notes** on any concerns you have about a child or vulnerable adult. Please share these with your Volunteer Coordinator so they can be recorded on our system.

Notes should include:

- The person's details (name, age, address)
- What was said or what happened that gave you cause for concern (if a verbal disclosure is made, write down their exact words)
- Any information the child / person has given you about the alleged abuser

Reporting procedures

IF THE CHILD / PERSON IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER CALL THE POLICE ON 999.

There are some cases that require an urgent response:

- If you suspect a serious criminal act has taken place, telephone 999.
- If the individual is injured seek immediate medical treatment

Information sharing

When sharing information, it must be done quickly to ensure the details are fresh in your mind. Use simple language to prevent misunderstandings. Make sure you share information securely to prevent it going to people who should not have it.

If you have any concerns about sharing information, please speak to your Volunteer Coordinator.

Reporting concerns

Once you become aware of a safeguarding concern that is not an emergency it must be **recorded and shared with your Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible.**

The Volunteer Coordinator will share your concerns with the designated safeguarding lead at Kinship. There will be a discussion about where there is a risk of significant harm. You may be asked to join this conversation if more information is needed.

If appropriate you may need to report your concerns. You will be supported to do so by your Volunteer Coordinator.

Whistle Blowing

There may be times where concerns remain about an incident.

If you are worried that:

- Your concerns were not dealt with properly
- Your concerns have been covered up
- Your concern was not acted upon
- You are worried about potential repercussions if you raise a concern

Please speak to the Volunteer Coordinator, their manager, the designated safeguarding lead, or another manager within Kinship.

As a last resort the **NSPCC** have a Whistle Blowing hotline that is available on: **0800 028 0285** or email on: help@nspcc.org.uk

Useful contact services and referral pathways

Wider support available from Kinship

Kinship Advice Service

We can advise anyone who is caring for a relative or friend's child full time, and anyone thinking about becoming a kinship carer.

Our friendly Advice Team are here for all kinship carers in England and Wales. They're experts in:

- Helping you to work out what benefits you might be entitled to
- Talking you through the different types of kinship care and your rights
- Helping with issues around housing or education
- Signposting to you further support

There are **two ways** to contact the team:

- Our free phoneline (**0300 123 7015**): Monday to Friday from 9.30am-2.00pm
- Filling in this simple form: <https://kinship.org.uk/for-kinship-carers/contact-our-advice-service/>

All advice is **free for kinship carers**. The team will also signpost you to other organisations depending on what you need. For example, if your kinship child or children have experienced bereavement, we'd put you in touch with [Winston's Wish](#).

Free workshops

Our Advice Team also offer **weekly free workshops** which you can book for your group or attend as an individual. Our two current workshops are:

- What financial help am I entitled to as a kinship carer?
- Introduction to kinship care

You can book these here: <https://kinshippeersupport.org.uk/workshops/> and more options will be coming in the near future

Kinship and the Peer Support Team

You can contact the Kinship Peer Support Team at peersupport@kinship.org.uk

Website: <https://kinshippeersupport.org.uk/>

Main Kinship website: <https://kinship.org.uk/>

Main office:

T: 03300 167 235

Email info@kinship.org.uk

Useful organisations and links

There are many national and local organisations that can offer support. You might find it useful to create a bank of resources that you can signpost group members to. Here are some to get you started.

Action for Happiness

Website: www.actionforhappiness.org

Action for Happiness is a movement for positive social change. Its website lists '10 keys to happier living' – practical ways to increase your wellbeing.

Be Mindful

Website: www.bemindful.co.uk

Mental Health Foundation website raising awareness of mindfulness, including details of local and online mindfulness courses.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Tel: 01455 883 300

Website: www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk

For information about counselling and therapy and to find practitioners in your area.

Mental Health Foundation

Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

As well as lots of useful information about mental health, the website also has free podcasts on wellbeing and managing stress.

Mind

Infoline: 0300 123 3393 open 9am-6pm Monday to Friday

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Website: www.mind.org.uk

Very informative website including a 'Mental Health A-Z', advice on reducing anxiety and managing depression, tips on dealing with stress and information on relaxation techniques.

SupportLine

Helpline: 01708 765200

Email: info@supportline.org.uk

Website: www.supportline.org.uk

Offers confidential emotional support to children, young adults and adults on any issue. SupportLine works with callers to develop healthy, positive coping strategies, an inner feeling of strength and increased self-esteem.

National Family Mediation Service (NFM)

Telephone: 0300 4000 636

Website: www.nfm.org.uk

Family mediation can be the most effective method of resolving family disputes, especially where children are involved. Agreements that have been freely negotiated can help restore communication, understanding and trust. In most cases mediation must be attempted before applying for a Child Arrangements Order. You can get more information and find local services by going to the NFM website or calling the number above.

Citizens Advice

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Citizens Advice provides online information and advice and has Bureaux all over the country delivering free, independent, confidential and impartial face-to-face and telephone advice.

Coram Children's Legal Centre – Child Law Advice Service

Advice line: 0300 330 5480 Monday to Friday 8am-6pm

Website: www.childlawadvice.org.uk

The website has detailed information and advice on family and children law matters in England, including contact issues. It also has a section on court processes in private family

law cases, and practical advice on representing yourself in court. The helpline is for advice on more complex matters and clarifying questions.

Family Lives

Helpline: 0808 800 2222

Monday to Friday 9am-9pm, Weekends 10am-3pm

Website: www.familylives.org.uk

Family Lives offers advice and support on all aspects of family life.

Relate

Telephone: 0300 100 1234

Website: www.relate.org.uk

Relate offers a range of services to help with couple and family relationships. You can talk to a Relate counsellor for free online. You can also book a telephone counselling session (there is a charge for this service) or find details of your nearest Relate service.

Samaritans

Telephone: 116 123, open 24 hours a day

Website: www.samaritans.org

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Samaritans provides confidential emotional support 24/7 to those experiencing feelings of distress or despair. You can talk to them any time you like, in your own way – and off the record – about whatever's getting to you. You don't have to be suicidal.

Thank you

We wanted to share a thank you with you. We know kinship carers need to know that they are not alone and there are others in their position. The development of another 100 peer support groups across England as part of this service, whether in-person or online are so crucial to help with this. But we could not do this without you. **Thank you.**

So, welcome to the family, we really look forward to working with you at every step and **if you need anything, at any time, then we are here.**