



University of Brighton

A Kinship Carers' Resource: Using Resilience Ideas in Practice



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With

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Acknowledgements

A number of people and organisations have helped us to draw together this resource and we would like to thank them for the emotional and practical support that they have given us:

All our grandchildren: for confidentiality reasons our grandchildren's names are not used in this resource but they have given their permission for our stories about kinship care to be included. We have learnt so much from our grandchildren about how to nurture resilience.

Melanie Rowland: Melanie works for Brighton and Hove Children's Services and runs a Kinship Care Support group which we all attend. The support group has been invaluable to us; it has enabled us to feel a sense of belonging as kinship carers, and it is a safe place where we have been able to share our joys and sorrows. Melanie has consistently demonstrated acceptance and commitment, two of the Noble Truths that you will hear about in this guide. Melanie was also involved in the resilience research project which has led to the production of this guide.

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Contact information

For further information about this guide and the Resilience Framework you can visit the boingboing website: www.boingboing.org.uk or contact Lindsay Hill: l.r.hill@brighton.ac.uk



Introduction.....1

The Resilience Framework.....7

Basics.....15

Belonging23

Learning31

Coping.....36

Core self44

Appendix 1: The Resilience Framework51

Appendix 2: National and local organisations.....52

Appendix 3: Glossary of terms and references /

Useful reading.....54

Introduction

What is Kinship Care?

Becoming a kinship carer can be a hard job. It may well be harder than anything that you have ever done before.

“We are not foster carers who are strangers to the children they care for and have no link to primary carers. Kinship carers have a bond and tie to their grandchild, niece, or nephew and to the parents of their children.”

Kinship carers care for grandchildren, nieces, nephews or children who are friends of their family. Due to difficult circumstances and social services involvement they have taken on the caring role of children who cannot be looked after by their birth parents.

Often people become kinship carers in isolation. Grandparents Plus has identified that there are growing numbers of isolated people who become kinship carers. They estimate 200,000 grandparents in the UK are caring for their grandchildren full-time. Kinship carers do not receive statutory government support.

While there are a number of kinship carers who do not have any involvement with children’s services, this book is written specifically for kinship carers who are looking after children who have been removed from the care of their birth parents following the intervention of social workers. Children in these situations will have experienced multiple disadvantages. In their early lives they are likely to have experienced some form of abuse or neglect. This can make the work of a kinship Carer more challenging, as the children themselves are likely to need extra support and understanding to enable them to trust that the adults in their lives can be relied on to help them through the complexities of childhood and adolescence. Becoming a kinship carer often coincides with a time of crisis and confusion for the whole family.

In these situations the ‘doing’ of kinship care requires carers to strongly commit themselves to being there for the child. They need to be able to understand the impact of early life experiences and be able to provide the practical and emotional support which can enable the child to feel secure enough to engage in helpful relationships, to make the best of learning opportunities and to have a sense of themselves as someone who is loved and who is worthy of love.

Kinship care is what carers learn to do in relationships with others, most importantly with the child they are caring for, but also with others who are important for the child such as birth parents, siblings, extended family members, friends and teachers. It involves trying to build a supportive network around the child and helping the child to be able to use that network in the best way possible.

There are many reasons why you should become a kinship carer

You can build an amazingly close relationship with your grandchild, niece, nephew or the child you are caring for. You can have the chance to be a parent again.

We have found kinship care to be a labour of love and also a learning process. You will bring up your grandchildren/nieces/nephews differently from how you brought up your own children.

Being a kinship carer can be very challenging and sometimes it is isolating. This resource can help you through some of the challenges that you might face as a kinship carer.

Some of the struggles we have encountered include:

- » Coping with the massive impact that being a kinship carer can have on family dynamics
- » Building a trusting relationship with children's services (one that may be difficult and strained at first)
- » Obtaining legal rights and security through a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order
- » Dealing with a whole barrage of society's judgements that you may be too old to care for children
- » Lack of finance and suitable accommodation
- » Having the time and energy to build a caring relationship with your child.

Kinship care is about what you do and what you need to make it possible to do the best you can for the child you are looking after.

This book is written by kinship carers who have themselves experienced the process of becoming the main carer and taking on a parental role. It is designed to give other kinship carers information about the challenges that they have experienced and how they have dealt with them. This guide uses direct quotes from kinship carers and they decided that they wanted their names to be included. The children they are caring for have also been involved in the research. The kinship carers have spoken with the children and the children are happy for the information in the guide to be published. For the purposes of anonymity the children's names have not been included.

You may have acquired this guide for a number of reasons:

- » You are concerned about how your grandchildren/nieces/nephew are being cared for by their parents and you are thinking that you may need to become a full-time carer

- » You have been approached by social services to take on a full-time caring role. You are aware that if you don't take on the caring role a child you care for may be fostered or adopted and you have a fear of losing contact.
- » You are looking after a grandchild/nephew/niece on a full-time basis and are looking for some help and support.
- » You know someone who is a kinship carer and you want to be able to support them.
- » You are interested in what it might mean to be a kinship carer.

It is important to acknowledge that becoming a kinship carer may not be right for you or for the child you are concerned about. If you are thinking about becoming a kinship carer we hope that this guide will give you some insights into what this could involve for you and your family.

What are the aims of this guide?

- » To offer practical advice and ideas that are accessible and can be put into practice.
- » To show how you might use Resilience Theory to support the decisions you make in caring for children.

Using the guide

This resource does not give step-by-step advice on what to do in particular situations. Rather, it makes suggestions about how you can use the Resilience Framework, developed by Angie Hart and the team, to help you decide what to do in day-to-day situations. (See Appendix 1 for an outline of the Framework). By giving examples of what the kinship carers in the research group have experienced, we hope that you will be able to think about how you might use these ideas yourself.

What do we mean by resilience? There are many definitions of resilience. For the purposes of this resource we have defined resilience as the ability to do well despite stressful life challenges. Resilience research has identified actions that can be taken to enable children to achieve good outcomes against the odds. In this guide we offer suggestions about the kind of things you can do to help build a network that supports a child's resilience.

Professor Angie Hart and collaborators have been looking at the resilience theory and exploring how it can be applied in practice to help children and young people withstand and recover from stressful life challenges. Angie and others have come up with a Resilience Framework that helps translate resilience theory into practice.

The Resilience Framework (adapted from Hart, Blincow and Thomas, 2007) is a way of working with children and young people that offers an overview framework for finding the best ways of helping them to get through when life is particularly tough. This resilience approach puts theory into practice so that young people, parents and practitioners can use the method in their daily lives. It is an evidence based and user-friendly way of working with children and young people. The Resilience Framework takes its inspiration from resilience theories, research and practice experience. It highlights the ordinary things that can be done to promote resilience for children living with complexity. We will tell you more about what is in the framework throughout this guide.

About Brighton Kinship Carer's Research Group

Brighton Kinship Carers, part of a larger peer support group of kinship carers, meet once a month for peer support sessions. The large group meets to support each other to talk about their experiences and give each other resilient tips and advice.

The five kinship carers responsible for developing this guide represent a group of seven kinship carers who originally came together to take part in a resilience research group. The research group was supported and facilitated by Lindsay Hill, a senior lecturer at Brighton University, and Melanie Rowland, a family support worker in a family and friends team. The research enabled the group to learn about the Resilience Framework and apply some of the techniques to help them in their role of being a kinship carer.

The resilience research group met for two years. Kinship carers came together monthly to explore their attempts to use the Resilience Framework in their day to day lives. Sam Taylor, a young person's counselor and play therapist, used the research findings to develop and write this guide with them. They wanted to highlight how the experience of being a kinship carer can be a challenging, isolating and rewarding experience. In writing this guide the group hopes that other kinship carers do not go through all the challenges and struggles that they have experienced without knowing about the Resilience Framework.

Everyone involved in writing this book has had different experiences which they want to share. They represent diversity in terms of race, culture, age and gender.

About the kinship carers

Colin is married to Mary and has been involved with the care of Mary's three grandsons since they were born. Colin thinks of the boys as his own sons. He and Mary decided from the beginning that it would be important for them not to fall out over the boys.

They do have differences of opinion but manage to sort these out amicably. Colin feels that the Resilience Framework has helped him to change his way of thinking and has embedded in him the importance of trying to use the framework to help the boys become more skillful in managing day to day life.

Loretta moved from Bermuda to look after her grandson when he was three years old. He is now 13. Loretta is now 70 and she has found it challenging to parent a child who is two generations removed from her. She has worked hard to support her grandson to have contact with his mother and father. At times this has involved making difficult decisions to limit contact, particularly when a parent has been unwell. Loretta's use of the Resilience Framework has reinforced for her the importance of trying to understand how children's confused emotions can be the cause of unpredictable behaviour.

Martha is a grandmother who cares for her two granddaughters on a full-time basis. Martha came to England from Uganda seven years ago. Martha's view of families is that "we are all normal in our own way". Martha has found the Resilience Framework to be a helpful tool in helping her to think about how to do kinship care in a culture which is very different from the one that she grew up in. Since joining the research group Martha has attended national conferences where she has spoken about her own experience of using the Resilience Framework to support her parenting.

Mary worked in a primary school and was a foster carer before taking on the responsibility of caring for her three grandsons. She obtained a Residence Order for her grandsons in 2001 and has looked after them ever since. The oldest is now 21 and the youngest is 16. For Mary being a mum and a nan to the boys had been a rocky road. Being involved in the research and learning about resilience has helped her to recognise the good things that she is doing. It has given her confidence. Mary thinks that she is parenting her grandchildren in a very different way from how she parented her own children.

Sarah has looked after her grandson for eight years; he is now nine years old. Sarah has had her own experience of struggling with mental health issues and has found that the Resilience Framework has been helpful in enabling her to focus on the things that she can do to take care of herself. Sarah has become increasingly aware that her grandson is confused about why he is not living with his mum and dad. Sarah has found that digging deep into the Resilience Framework is helping her to support her grandson to make sense of his current situation and in particular to help him with his sense of belonging.

About Lindsay Hill

Lindsay brought together the kinship carers who have been responsible for writing this guide. Lindsay is an academic and a social worker and teaches social work students at the University of Brighton. She is interested in how the ideas of resilience research can be used by parents, carers and social workers to help children who have experienced difficult times in their lives. The work that she has done with kinship carers is the basis of her doctoral studies. She has co-ordinated the collaborative research project from which the ideas informing this guide have been drawn. Her doctorate is supervised by Professor Angie Hart. Lindsay is a grandparent and has grandchildren in England and Australia.

About Sam Taylor

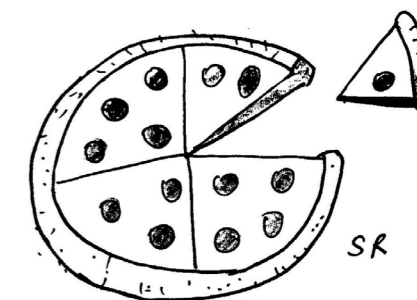
Sam is an experienced youth worker, teacher, qualified counselor and play therapist who has worked with young people and families for 15 years. She has worked closely with the kinship carer research group in the writing of this guide. Sam has worked closely with young people who are experiencing troubled times and she uses ideas drawn from the Resilience Framework and from resilience therapy in her work with these young people. Sam has also helped a group of young people to write a resilience guide for parents, available at www.boingboing.org.uk (in the section about getting hold of work by boingboing).

About Angie Hart

This guide has been written with support from Professor Angie Hart and we have used her ideas about resilience to frame it. Angie is an academic and a child and family therapist. She works at the University of Brighton and is a co-director of boingboing, a not-for-profit community interest company dedicated to using resilience ideas in research and practice. She has written two books on using resilience ideas in child and family mental health. Angie has three children adopted from the care system. The website www.boingboing.org.uk can tell you more about her work.

The Resilience Framework

This guide provides examples of how the Resilience Framework has helped members of the Kinship Carers Research group cope better in supporting the children in their care by providing strategies, support and encouragement. The following chapters will guide you through this framework and give you ideas about how to use it.



You may have heard the word 'resilience' before picking up this guide and may still be wondering what it means. Kinship carers in the research group described resilience as "something" that helps you to grow and be strong in difficult circumstances. What this "something" is can be hard to identify. There is, however, lots of research that tells us that there are many things that can be done to help children and young people who are having a hard time in life do as well as they can.

Kinship carers in the research group have learnt about the Resilience Framework. This guide contains examples of how they have used the framework, which some people also refer to as a toolkit. They like the Resilience Framework because it focuses on what can be achieved rather than not achieved. They think that it gives them more knowledge and power over what they might like to try. Often it is easy to feel that professionals are taking over and this can make you feel powerless when decisions have to be made. The Resilience Framework can be used to check out what you are already doing. It can also be used to help you to develop different ideas about what you might do. By focusing on the things that you can do, however small these things may seem, the aim is to enable you to feel more empowered and supported in your role as a kinship carer.

Writing this guide has been an exciting as well as a challenging process. The idea for writing the guide arose during discussions in the research group when Martha, Loretta, Sarah, Mary and Colin talked about the issues they had dealt with as kinship carers and the difficult decisions they had had to make. They thought that if they had known about the Resilience Framework before, it would have helped them to have a better understanding of the complexity of the relationships they were dealing with and more ideas about the different ways of trying to help children who have experienced early childhood difficulties.

Their aim in writing this guide is to use their experience to offer ideas and support to other kinship carers. What follows is their understanding of resilience with examples of how the framework has helped them to explain what they do as kinship carers and how learning about resilience has enabled them to further develop their skills and knowledge.

Resilience and the Noble Truths

The Resilience Framework can help you to focus on what can be done day to day to encourage and support children in dealing with life's challenges. The emphasis is on building on the things that children do well and helping them to engage in positive experiences. As previously mentioned it is a toolkit of ideas for you and the young person to use to help you to decide how resilience-building activities might happen. Underpinning this toolkit is something called the "noble truths". They are underpinning beliefs and values that are part of what enables the Resilience Framework to be applied in everyday life. They are not easy to achieve, but they are important ideas to keep in mind. They are: **Acceptance, Conserving, Commitment and Enlisting.**

Acceptance

"It goes in stages: first realisation this is happening, second the commitment I am going to bring up this child and then third, acceptance this is my new parental role...in my experience acceptance came gradually until I fully settled into the acceptance." **Sarah**

As Sarah suggests, acceptance is not an easy process. Responding and relating to changing situations even though they may have not been what you hoped for involves accepting and trying to find a way to construct a life that may be different from the one you had anticipated. The reward of connecting and building a loving relationship with the child will be well worth your time and effort.

At first it may be very overwhelming having to adapt your life so that you take full responsibility and care of the child. Taking on full caring responsibility could give you lots of sleepless nights, worries and disappointments. Being a kinship carer is hard work both physically and emotionally.

"There are so many dimensions to acceptance. Conflicting emotions pull you to past, present and future. Acceptance is really important; you can't change the past and it is not easy to come to a place of acceptance. You do this the best you can and don't choose your circumstances and you don't beat yourself up." **Martha**

Acceptance involves recognising the hurt that children have experienced and may continue to experience due to the behaviour of their parents.

"You have to recognise they are hurting and the change and impact this has had on their early years. They didn't want to end up living with us. You also have to deal with your own disappointments. It stays with you, all the way through it is lingering in the background." **Colin**

How you respond and relate to each changing situation can make a world of difference to the wellbeing of the child. Even though the situation may have not been what you hoped for, finding a way of understanding the complexity of the situation can help you find a way to construct a life that is good for the child and your family.

Acceptance may also involve the recognition that you need to change your style of parenting. If you are a grandparent this means recognising that you are two generations removed from your grandchild and that the understanding of children's needs has changed over time. Like Martha you may have been brought up in a culture which is different from the one you are now living in:

"I had to adjust to learn new parenting skills because the parenting skills the way you bring up your kids here is not the way we bring up kids in Africa, because of the environment, the conditions in Africa." **Martha**

Conserving

"Conserving is about praise and capturing successes. The child you are caring for might feel rejection and confusion, they may be questioning why they are not living with their parents. This is why it is important to give them constant positive feedback so that they don't grow up with this feeling of constant rejection. It is important to remind them of what is good in them and appreciate them so they can not feel rejected." **Martha**

Conserving is when you hang on in there and notice the good things that are happening. Conserving can stop you focusing on the negatives and capture little successes. We have found that building a child's resilience is about building on the strengths they already have and using them when they are really needed. Considering when things at home work best and what makes the child more settled and happy really helps. By pinpointing the child's strengths or successes situations can be turned around.

Building simple routines into your daily schedule can help you capture little successes and verbally recognise positive experiences in family life. One message we have found is that it is important to give the children we are caring for time to talk. It is really important to grab these moments and construct a space, a special one-to-one time, in order to build on that relationship.

“10 –15 minutes just us talking about whatever he wants to talk about. Giving them one-to-one time doing it when you are in a good space so you can respond well to them. It also helps me to see that when I can have the strength myself I can hold this relationship.” Sarah

Conserving is also about the future. The things a kinship carer can do now to help with the child’s future, how you can construct something that is positive that will get them through this difficult time in their lives:

“My grandson loves fishing and he is good at it. He is beginning to think about how, in building up his skills, he may be able to find a job which is outdoors, which he really would like to have.” Loretta

Conserving is part of a process of trying to build children’s confidence and self-esteem and involves being aware that children are likely to notice that their family life is different and they may be troubled by this:

“Conserving is also about recognising how things can have an impact outside the home and can undermine their self-esteem. I am aware of how negative messages from society can impact on how my grandson feels about himself. Things like Mummy and Daddy stuff in books, adverts, and films. I regularly reinforce and talk to him about how we are a family. I make sure I build his self-esteem as much as possible.” Sarah

Finally do not forget the importance of humour.

“I think humour is really conserving. Sometimes laughing at things and at life. I have a dark humour, it helps gets me through everything.” Mary

It is important to not beat yourself up, to be aware that you are trying to do your very best. In this process it helps if you can notice and conserve all the good things you are doing and have achieved.

Commitment

“I assumed because his dad had eight or nine extended family members they would take him in. They have been no support whatsoever. I have been caring for my grandson for 10 years now – at first I honestly thought it was an interim thing. Of course, now I started caring for him and have created a relationship with this boy, if I did have to give him up it would be like taking off my right arm.” Loretta

Being a kinship carer requires continual parental commitment. The realisation of the level of commitment and responsibility involved can be very daunting. Sometimes kinship carers have conflicting feelings about this and feel a loss of the kind of life they may have planned for themselves. As a kinship carer we believe it is important to acknowledge these feelings and this doesn’t mean you are a bad person it just means you are human. Supporting the child and being completely committed to their wellbeing can be hugely rewarding and it is important to recognise what a difference you can make to the child’s life. It is about hanging on and being consistent, building a trusting, reliable and predictable relationship with the child.

Enlisting

As a kinship carer you can’t do it all on your own. You need to enlist the help of others. Encourage a community of people around you who appreciate and value the effort that you are making and can help by offering support. As a kinship carer you need to enlist a range of people who can help with various tasks to strengthen your child’s resilience. Friends and family can be very supportive. It is also important to surround yourself with people of authority, professional status and expert knowledge to help you and even act on your behalf. However we know that this is not an easy thing to do. Asking for help can feel like admitting defeat; you may think that it will suggest to others that you cannot manage.

We believe that support groups can be really helpful. Support groups enable you to share your experience with others who will have some understanding of what you are going through. Finding a support group can help you to feel less isolated:

“Kinship carer meetings help me meet my needs. It is a safe place where I can express my emotional and psychological problems and feel that people empathise with what I am going through. I can get advice and I really understand what everyone is talking about.” Sarah.

Apart from support groups there are organisations such as Grandparents Plus, which offer information and support. A list of places that you might consider going to for support are included in the back of this book.

Top tips: the noble truths

- » Don't beat yourself up.
- » Acceptance is really hard...it comes gradually and what you need is to accept changes over time.
- » Forgive yourself and move on – you can't harbour old feelings.
- » Write down things that have gone well, these can be useful reminders when times are difficult. In particular notice the things that your child does well and take time to tell them about their achievements.
- » Think of at least two people who can support you and your child, talk to them now and decide how they might be able to help you.

The Resilience Framework

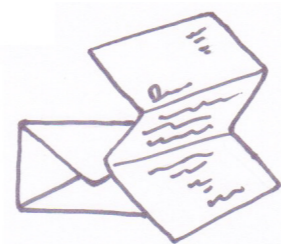
The Resilience Framework identifies five areas of children's lives that need to be addressed in order to support the building of resilience:

- » **Basics**
- » **Belonging**
- » **Learning**
- » **Coping**
- » **Core self**

Within these areas there is a range of things to try to do that can help build resilience for the child you are caring for. The framework is a box of pick-and-mix ideas which can be used to help you make decisions about what actions to take on a day-to-day basis – it is like a toolkit. You can also try and apply it for yourself to strengthen your own resilience when being in the role of kinship carer. The different areas of the Resilience Framework are not designed to be used as a step by step guide one after the other, rather they can be called upon when needed and several can be used at the same time.

Basics

It is important to have basic structures in place such as good enough housing and financial support so that you feel safe enough to fully support the child you are caring for. This sense of security will give you a peace of mind and enable you to deal with the stress of bringing up and developing a new or different relationship with the child. Martha knew that her accommodation was too small for her and her granddaughters but did not realize the extent to which this was affecting their relationships:



"Since I have been learning about the framework it has given me the confidence to challenge the Housing Department: I wrote to my MP, and got help from the children's social worker. We have moved now and it has made such a difference for us all." **Martha**

Belonging

This is one of the most important aspects of resilience building because it is important that the child feels attached and bonded with the family caring for them. Due to their complex family relationships and past traumatic experiences the children that you care for might struggle to feel that they belong. As a kinship carer you can help the child develop healthy attachments by encouraging good relationships with friends, family and others. It is important the child has somewhere they feel that they belong (clubs, activities, school, relationships with animals, and a favourite place) and that they meet people who are good influences, who help them make a sense of where they come from and their place in the world. Loretta makes sure that she does all she can to support her grandson's friendships:

"Because I am an old woman it has been important for me to make sure that my grandson's friends come to the house. I do not even think now that they think of me as doing anything else than what their mums do. If you do involve yourself in the child, in what they are interested in, it is important for them to see your home, how you live. I always ask what they like best to eat, it is usually pizza." **Loretta**

Learning

Due to early and current experiences the child you are caring for may struggle in school and they could experience difficulties which interfere with their learning. They may underachieve so it is important to talk to their teachers. Teachers can help the child develop life skills, encourage them to cope with school life, understand boundaries and have aspirations, which are crucial parts of helping the child become more resilient. It may also be that teachers are not aware that school life is not working well; your child may be being bullied because they do not live with their mum or dad, and they may also be experiencing racism like Martha's granddaughter:

"It was hard for me to go to the school because in my culture women are taught to be calm and respectful and not raise their voices. But there are times in your life when things are thrown at you and you must put your foot down. I knew that my granddaughter was being bullied. I have to stand up for her. I cannot leave her feeling hopeless." **Martha**

Coping

Being a Kinship Carer can be very challenging for you and the child you are caring for. Learning to cope with the task of being a Kinship Carer can help you and the child build a particular set of skills to help with ever changing challenges of everyday life. Encouraging your child to cope helps them develop a sense of bravery, an ability to solve problems, to stand up for their own views and beliefs, foster interests and make themselves feel better. One good way of coping is making sure that, as a parent, you are surrounded by a good community of support.

“When I took on caring for my grandson I spoke to my mother and my uncle, we agreed that my mother would look after him one night a week, so that I could have some time to myself. This has continued. Now he spends some time each weekend with his great grandmother. My uncle plays football with him, he is a good role model.” Sarah

Core self

Early traumatic experiences may have impacted on a child’s sense of who they are. As a kinship carer helping your child build an understanding of who they are includes helping them to develop a sense of empathy towards others and an understanding of how their behaviour can impact on others. It is important to help them be self-aware and take responsibility for their behaviour towards others while at the same time recognising that the ability to do this changes as children grow and learn.

“My granddaughter often gets angry. The therapist gave me this idea of a rocket, it is made up of different colours. Green is at the bottom and red is at the top, red is when she is very angry. So she is learning now that her anger builds up, we say where are you now on the rocket? This can help her to stop and think and we talk about it.” Martha.

In the next section we provide examples of how as kinship carers we have used the different areas of the Resilience Framework to help us to identify resilience-building activities for the child and for ourselves. There is no definitive answer about what to do in complex situations, however these are all activities which we have found helpful. Each kinship care situation is unique; the intention is that the framework is used flexibly to support the positive things that you are already doing.

Basics

In order to help create a positive environment for you and your child it is important to feel that you have the basic necessities in place.

Good enough housing

Martha and her two girls were living in a one-bedroom flat. Living in a one-bedroom flat with two girls felt very overcrowded. The flat was situated in a rough area which was not a suitable place for young children to live. After writing several letters to different professionals and organisations Grandparents Plus wrote on Martha’s behalf to her MP. Martha and her girls did eventually move to a three-bedroomed flat. It is easy at first to think you can manage with the space that you have got but as time goes on the children grow up and their needs become different.

As you start caring for the child the issue of housing and space needs to be considered. If you have any concerns about housing it is really important these issues are raised with Children’s Services. Often the responsibility of taking on a new child and sorting out housing and space can feel overwhelming and this is why it is important to start getting help and negotiating with social workers for what you need. Children’s Services do not provide accommodation, however they should be able to assess and support your housing situation. If you think that you are not being heard you can write to your MP.

Enough money to live

At first as a kinship carer you may struggle to find financial assistance. Having the right amount of money to support the child is essential and will improve your stress levels, as well as the child’s quality of life. There are ways you can get support with sorting out your finances and the best place to start with is your social worker, health visitor or your local Citizen’s Advice Bureau. Solicitors can also inform you of what you are legally entitled to.

“The most difficult thing about being a kinship carer is that you don’t know one year from the next what to expect. If you want the best for your child and the basics aren’t put in place then you are going to be stressed out of your brain!I had to clean houses. It was very degrading for me because I had once owned my own business.” Loretta

If your income is low you should be entitled to some financial assistance. Local authorities have now recognised that kinship carers need financial help but unfortunately support is not standardised. This means that the amount that kinship carers receive is different in every local authority and in every specific case. When you become a kinship carer you have a financial assessment and you will be asked to give proof of everything you earn. The means test takes into consideration any benefits you are receiving and child benefit is deducted from any allowance you do receive. Kinship Carer Allowance is assessed once a year and if your circumstances change throughout the year speak or write to your social worker.

“Going through the financial assistance means-testing can be gruelling. It makes it hard to get the financial assistance you deserve because my income changes throughout the year so only completing a financial assistance form once a year does not give a correct financial measure.” **Loretta**

“When my grandchild was one I never had a washing machine, a cot, a wardrobe and my cooker was on the blink and the health visitor said you need to go to social services because you need these items. So it was through my health visitor I found out I could apply for a grant. I learnt from the health visitor that you can go to social services to give you a grant which is called an Extra Living Allowance.” **Sarah**

The bottom line is that you need money to survive and care for the child and the key message here is not to be frightened to ask for financial support and recognise it is important to both you and the child.

You can get advice on money from Grandparents Plus, health visitors, social workers, Citizens Advice and solicitors. There may also be local organisations that can help you. In Brighton, Amaze is a registered charity which helps parents who look after children who have disabilities (see back of resource for details on Amaze and other sources of information).

Being safe

There are lots of different dimensions to this section on being safe, these include:

The responsibility of caring for someone else's child:

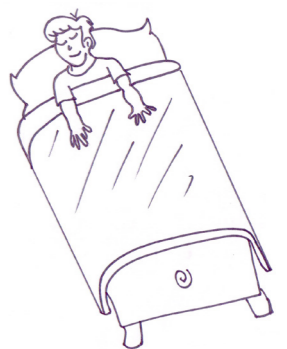
“The hardest thing about being a kinship carer is that you have huge responsibility for caring for someone else's child. It feels like you have to be extra vigilant in their care, because you are looking after an abused child, and you feel very protective over their care. You also feel under pressure and scrutiny in case you don't look after the children really well.” **Sarah**

“My granddaughter is a very playful child and I am often worrying about the consequences of her scratching herself or getting a mark on her head. Physical safety I am very cautious about, I have this big fear that social services will take them away from me if they are physically hurt” **Martha**

“As a kinship carer I feel a lot more cautious towards these children. They are technically your daughter's children so you are still feeling very cautious and protective. We were very careful what schools we chose. We definitely felt that extra responsibility. We had to take them everywhere in the car so that they were kept very safe. We felt like we had to be with them all the time. You are constantly worrying what will happen next.” **Mary**

Physical and emotional safety

A kinship carer's role is to give the child clear boundaries that help them feel safe when they feel vulnerable. Supporting the safety of the child you are looking after involves striking a balance between being over-protective and expecting too much of the child. Children need to be able to take risks in order to grow and develop, but you need to make sure that they get the support they need for these risks to have good consequences. A child who has experienced early difficulties in their life may need extra support in order to be able to feel safe.



“We had to give them an emotionally safe environment 24/7, the pressure was immense. For the first six years my youngest used to sleep in our bed and he felt so unsafe that he asked me to guard him while he slept.” **Mary**

As children grow older helping them to plan for risky situations is important:

“My grandson wanted to take the bus to see his friends, it is not far but I worry. He has a mobile phone now so I took him to the bus stop and when he got to his friend's house he phoned me. I phoned his friend's parent as well so I knew they were expecting him.” **Loretta**

Safe contact with family members

Kinship carers have the task of managing the child's contact with other family members and this can be a difficult process. Having to decide whether the contact is nourishing or harmful can put a strain on family dynamics, particularly when birth parents are involved. If you have any concerns it is important to monitor things like telephone calls and try to take notice of how the child is dealing with them:

"I have noticed with my grandson, if his mum calls I can soon tell if the phone call is not going well and I will say to tell mum you have to go, but he hates to hang up on his mum. Finally I have to take the phone and say he has to go now. I am teaching him that he does not have to be burdened by her and he can hang up and get off the phone." **Loretta**

In some cases the behaviour of a parent may be such that you have to make the hard decision to stop contact all together. This can be particularly difficult as it may feel like you are rejecting your own son or daughter:

"We had to make a conscious decision to no longer invite their mum to the house. Often she would be passed out on the floor or falling asleep while eating dinner. It wasn't helping the boys and it was too disruptive. Looking after the boys now is our number one priority." **Mary**

"My daughter turned up at our doorstep at five o'clock in the morning with no shoes on ringing our doorbell. I had to tell her to go away and that I couldn't answer the door. It was very hard but I had to think of my grandson's safety and although she went away I still spent the rest of the night and day worrying about her." **Loretta**

Transport and access to places and things

When you first become a kinship carer you may have to go to lots of appointments with and without the child. Travelling can be very tiring, as well as emotionally draining. It is worth exploring what help is available to make getting out and about more manageable.

"Transport is completely ongoing! You need to get them to school five days a week, also if they have health issues getting them to appointments, as well as if they have special needs where you have to take them to looked after children reviews." **Mary**

"Child services can support you with travelling to get to court, assessments, hospital, taxi to school and take them to therapy and contact with parents. They can pay for travel. You must ask them to pay for it." **Martha**

Healthy diet

When a child has been affected by a past experience of neglect they may displace and express any insecure feelings onto food. As a kinship carer it is important to understand the emotional significance food may have for a child. This can be challenging and it is important that you gently try to understand any issues with food and how this may be linked to their early childhood experiences. The child's behaviour can involve eating or not eating:



"My granddaughter used to refuse to eat, she was starving herself, when she came back to me from care feeding was a problem. I was cooking a lot of things for her to eat so she could try to eat them and it took a long time to get her to settle in and trying different foods." **Martha**

"My grandson will eat everything because he is scared that there will be no food left tomorrow. He didn't know if food would be there again – he has to eat now. When they were little their diet was limited to crisps." **Mary**

"The more effort I put in with food, the more love and care he feels." **Sarah**

When you first take on looking after the child, helping the child feel settled with routine and structure such as regular dinner times is really useful. Providing food for the child can make them feel they are loved and secure. Food can help improve moods, behaviours and ability to learn. One of the complex roles that a kinship carer can have is to try to balance the tension between providing the child with nice, good food while at the same time acknowledging the child's emotional state which may affect their ability to eat proper meals and healthy food.

"My grandson still doesn't eat a proper meal with us. We have to buy sausage rolls and healthy snacks. Although we cook a proper meal we do not push him into eating, to sit down and eat with us. We can understand that because of his early upbringing and childhood experiences this is his emotional eating pattern." **Mary**

Exercise and fresh air

Spending time outside helps the child to be more active, confident, make new friends, forget about the stress of school and family life. This can be done in a variety of ways; spending time playing in the park, getting them to help out at the allotment, walking the dog or going fishing.

“My grandson lost his confidence because we had difficult abusive neighbours and so he wouldn’t play outside, he was almost agoraphobic. I thought ‘I need to nip this in the bud’, and got him a new scooter. Playing on the new scooter means he can whiz around the park and gets him outdoors and is a way he can interact and socialise with other children.” Sarah

“My grandson and I go fishing every single weekend and he loves it. The biggest fish he caught was 17lb and he catches at least five or six a day. I sit with him and read my book and it gives me a chance to relax.” Loretta

If you are a grandparent you may find it challenging to be active with the child. You may also have a disability which makes getting around harder for you. Try to find things that you can enjoy together. As children grow up the way they spend their leisure time changes. It is important to be aware of this and find people who can help you.

Playtime and leisure

Being able to play is important to a child’s wellbeing. Play can enrich their development and help them work through painful issues. Socially play can help them feel more confident as they can try to play out different social skills. Play can help children express themselves and explore their feelings. Play is a great way of teaching children boundaries and safe ways of behaving.

“When my grandson first came to live with us he did not know how to play, he had been a carer, he was the one who always looked after the other boys, stopping them from hurting themselves, and he was very protective. He had to learn how to play – he had never had that opportunity....He loves fixing Vespas and playing around fixing their engines.” Colin

“When my granddaughter first came back from care she used to play out her experience of being in care. Her doll would be looking after her sister doll that was in care. She used to say to her doll ‘look how mature you are looking after your little sister’ . Play helped her play out what had happened to her while she was in care.” Martha

“I love watching my youngest granddaughter play with her doll, how in her way she will talk to it, ‘how are you feeling, smile don’t be sad’. Watching her talk and play with the doll you feel there is a message there and maybe that is how she wants me to talk to her. This doll is now her baby and she is taking care of it and she is trying to pass on, ‘I wish someone would talk to me like this and tell me everything is ok and comfort me’.” Martha

It is also helpful to identify other people who can be involved in helping children to play and enjoy their leisure time.

“My grandson’s dad is always laughing. He is always clowning around – children need that; they don’t need all seriousness all the time. They need someone to clown around and play with. After he spends time with his dad I can hear him coming up the steps, singing and whistling because he is happy and he had some fun time.” Loretta

If you are an older grandparent, or a carer with a disability, playing can feel like yet another challenge. Our advice is to keep things as simple as possible:

“Even though I am in a wheelchair we have fun. My son has a skateboard and we go down the seafront together me whizzing in my wheel chair and him on his skateboard. I make me being in a wheel chair as normal as possible.” Shelly

“The other day I surprised my grandson when he came home. I said come on let’s box and we play pretend boxing together. I pretended he had given me a right/left and then I fell down on the chair, he thought it was so funny. And he giggles and laughs because he has never seen me like that. He really enjoyed it and it really paid off because it made him feel really happy.” Loretta

Being free from prejudice and discrimination

The child you are caring for may experience some form of discrimination or bullying because they are not being looked after by their birth parents. The best way to deal with any bullying and discrimination is to listen to the child and take action to bring this to the attention of other adults who can help. Sometimes bullying takes place in school. If this is the case teachers must be involved. Talking about prejudice and discrimination helps. When the child is at an appropriate age to hear information about their family background the best approach is to be honest and tell them the truth about their situation, in a way that makes sense for them.

It may feel natural to want to protect the child; however, it will become more difficult for you and the child if they find out about family dynamics on their own or through somebody else.

“My girls sometimes experience double discrimination. They are bullied because they do not live with their mum and they are bullied because of the colour of their skin. I tell them that when somebody bullies a person that person is not behaving well; it’s that person that has the problem. I also challenged the school and they had to deal with it and they did.” **Martha**

“When the boys were little we used to say to the boys that they can say that their mum has a bad back and can’t look after them until they are older – this helped them deal with difficult and uncomfortable situations when they were asked why they are living with their grandparents.” **Mary**

“I try to make my daughter’s mental health illness not a taboo. I openly tell people she is mentally ill.” **Sarah**

Having basics in place can help you care for the child without being overwhelmed by the everyday stresses of life.

Top tips: Basics

- » Put basics in place as soon as possible and this will help you be in a stronger position to face challenging situations.
- » Write letters and enlist the support of professionals and organisations to get the appropriate finances, adequate housing and support.
- » Don’t be scared of Children’s Services assessing your housing and financial situation – they can support you to find better housing.
- » Don’t be scared to limit or say no to contact with birth parents if it is detrimental to the child.
- » Be aware that a child may displace and express any insecure feelings in their attitude to food, and gently explore any issues linked to their experience of being loved.
- » Be aware that the child you are caring for may experience bullying for a variety of reasons linked to their living situation, disability, race, culture. Make sure they are supported appropriately and the bullying is stopped.
- » Be open to the idea that the confusions that your child may be experiencing could contribute to their own bullying behaviour. Stay calm and give lots of reassurance and cuddles.

Belonging

An important kinship care activity involves doing things that support the development of good relationships with and for the children you care for. This involves helping them, wherever possible, to maintain healthy relationships with family members and a wider circle of friends.

Belonging is one of the most important aspects of resilience-building. Due to their complex family relationships and past experiences the children that you care for might struggle to feel that they belong. Kinship carers try to support children to develop healthy relationships by providing unconditional love, safety, and containment. It is important for children to feel that they are loved and valued. This may be tricky; some children’s behaviour can be very difficult. Don’t despair, there are suggestions in this and the following section on how to cope and support the development of strong relationships. Belonging begins when children experience their home as a place they can feel part of, a place where they feel cared for and understood. Feelings of belonging can become stronger when children are able to feel part of their school, a club or community.

Find somewhere to belong

As a kinship carer you can help improve your child’s sense of belonging. The bond you create with your child is crucial in developing and contributing to their much needed sense of security and stability.

“It is important that your child experiences stability and belonging. This means having family connections whatever they are. My little boy is not actually related to me in any way, but he is my family, we are the unit that we call our family and it does not have to be blood. I think you make the tie and bond yourselves.” **Shelly**

“I tell all three that I love them, not every day, but when they are least expecting it. My eldest grandson one day went to the shop with me and the man in the shop called me his mum. He never calls me mum. I do not want them to lose any sense of belonging to their birth mum, because she is their mum and she always will be. My grandson said I do not care, I like them to think that you are my mum, which was really sad for her. It gave me a real sense of how much he had a sense of belonging to me and family is everything as far as I am concerned.” **Mary**

Help the child understand their place in the world

Finding a place in the world can be very confusing and sometimes painful for the child, especially if they have a complex family history. This can mean that helping the child to work out their relationship with you and other family members can be tricky. Helping them to value their different and diverse family experiences and recognise the strengths that their family has can be really helpful.



Having the right information to give to them is essential; at the same time it is important to think about whether or not the child is ready to explore their relationships with family members. It is helpful to think about your understanding of family dynamics, how to refer to the complexities of family relationships, and what to say when you speak to the child. You may need support yourself in order to talk thorough different ways of doing this.

"I found life story worked. I had a box full of photos of the children when they were babies with videos of their dad and people in their lives. I talk about family stories and it is great being a grandparent because we have all these pictures."

Mary

"I'm not blood-related but family has always been their family. My family is added to their family tree and it all ends up combined into one big family. My grandson is very proud of his great grandfather (my granddad) and tells people about him. The secret is to seeing family in the widest sense possible."

Colin

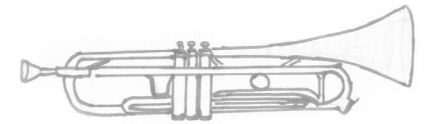
When children do see their parents they may end up feeling confused about whether or not it is alright to love them and how that might affect their relationship with you. It is helpful to reassure them that loving or missing their parent does not mean they are being disloyal to you.

"Since she has been developing this relationship with her dad maybe she feels it is like a betrayal. She said 'mam I want to live with you....you are the person I want to live with until I die'. I said that when you get older you might have kids and you will have your kids and you will love them very much and you will love your husband. Sometimes they get a bit confused, sometimes they may think they are being disloyal to us by loving their parents, which is not correct. I just wanted to help her understand that she can love her dad as much or even more than she loves me and we will still have a place in her heart."

Martha

Tap into good influences

Identify, encourage and enlist people you trust who can act as role models to support what you are doing. This can involve befriending new people or re-establishing old relationships.



Clubs and organisations can help your child to develop interests and skills, based on an experience of working together with others.

Groups can also provide a sense of community and acceptance and are potential places for the child to develop their sense of belonging.

"My daughters have music, keyboard and trumpet lessons. Also they spend time with families from church. They are like wider family to them."

Martha

"My grandson goes to chess club, karate and after-school clubs twice a week. These clubs help him socialise which does not come naturally to him and he is confident meeting more children now and has more zest for life."

Sarah

Mentors can help the child to think about how to do and say things and, because they're liked and looked up to by the child, they imitate them.

"Our eldest is autistic and he split up with his girlfriend. At the time we sought out people that could positively impact his life. One of them was a friend who knew our grandson when he was a baby. He came up with useful ideas; he came to our house bringing old computers that our grandson could take apart so that he had something else to focus on. He was really helpful and told him to take the girlfriend's number out of his phone as well as take her off face book. If I had suggested it he wouldn't of taken it in but he listened because it came from someone else."

Mary

Keep relationships going

"Although I do not see eye-to-eye with my grandson's father I can see why it is important that he plays a part in his life. The man is always laughing, everything is a big joke, he is a big kid and he is always clowning around with him. Children need that; they do not need all seriousness all the time. They need someone to clown around and play with."

Loretta

Prioritising the continuity of relationships can be really important. People who can be there for the long term are more likely to understand the child’s needs and care about them. When children get to know and feel comfortable with people they relax and worry less about getting on with others, shifting their energy to having fun and being themselves. Due to the complexity of the child’s upbringing and life it is important to have people in the child’s life who will commit to and accept their situation and if they move away will make an effort to keep in touch and continue the relationship.

“My grandson’s maths teacher had a really good relationship with him and then he moved to Germany. He still keeps in touch – he emails him every now and again”. **Mary**

The more healthy relationships the better

Children of kinship carers may have to deal with negative responses about not living with their birth parents. They may face bullying and teasing while at the same time having to deal with their own conflicting feelings, frustrations and confusion about their relationships to family members. This section is about increasing the number of good healthy relationships in your child’s life. This can be done through supporting them to have positive relationships with family members, neighbours, youth workers, and teachers and supporting them to make healthy relationships with peers.

“And now my son tells me that he has been looking everywhere and he has discovered his dad who is living in Norway; he has another family there so he went over at Christmas and now we are planning on going at Easter. Now my granddaughters hear that they have another family. I am sitting down and explaining to them. Sometimes they find it difficult but they are happy that their grandfather is alive and they will get to see him. But one thing I emphasise that this is their home.” **Martha**

“The boys tell people a story, so that they don’t feel embarrassed, if they are asked why they don’t live with their mum. They say that she had a fall and hurt her back and couldn’t look after them.” **Mary**

Animals can be strong source of support for children; they may feel more comfortable about explaining their feelings to an animal.

“Last week I had my son’s stepson, who is 8. He found our dog a real comfort when his mum was in hospital. He would lay down with the dog and talk to her and tell her all these things that are really worrying because his mum is having an operation. He found the dog a real comfort.” **Mary**

Take what you can from any relationship where there is some hope

It is important to think about how you can increase the amount of support that is available to you and the child. An African proverb says that it takes a village to support a child through to adulthood and we think that it is important to think about who you can involve in your “village” network.

“I love my family; there may be differences in size, colour and strength. I think that family is very important yet at the same time we draw strength from different places. I have a strong attachment, sense of belonging to my church. I draw a lot of strength from there...I have a strong sense of belonging with my family in Uganda, also very close friends that have almost stopped being friends and are now like my sisters.” **Martha**

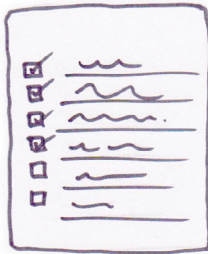
Try to find adults and children who will have positive impact in the child’s life. It might take a leap of faith but try to positively expand your family network. Find your support group and it will provide you with an immense level of support.

“The kinship carers group gives me a sense of belonging. It is a place where I can speak my native language. They are fellow kinships carers. They understand what I am going through. Connectedness – I can relate to them very easily.” **Mary**

Get together people the child can count on

“My grandson goes to see his grandfather every weekend, his grandfather is good at maths and he can help with his school work. He thinks his granddad is the cleverest person he has ever known.” **Loretta**

The idea here is to get together a team of people who can help support you and the child. Let the child know that these people are around, ask them to do things for you so that the child knows that they can be relied upon.



Belonging involves responsibilities and obligations too

Responsibilities and obligations are a central part of belonging. Children need appropriate roles, responsibility and independence including running errands and doing chores. This helps them develop positive self-esteem and have a sense of being able to make their own mark and be part of their family.

“I try to instil in them to never take anything for granted, because we are very fortunate for being a family and living in this country. It is important that they appreciate what we have.” **Colin**

Focus on good times and places

“I have a picture of my three grandsons at Legoland. I like the way it shows how they all belong, they are brothers by their mother, they have all got different dads but belonging to me is family and all the ties that bind you to a family. I get a huge sense of belonging with my boys, I call them my boys, I am so proud of them, and they are such lovely boys. They have their ups and downs but they know they belong as part of our family and it has never been different.” **Mary**

Family rituals and ceremonies are really important in helping your child feel like they belong. Family rituals can instil a sense of comfort, stability and security especially if the child is going through emotional upset and difficulties. You can help the child reconnect to good experiences by collecting family stories and creating a photo file to look at and share with the child where you can recall the happy events and good times.

“I use photographs, videos and talk about good times a lot so we don’t forget the memory and can remember.” **Sarah**

Make sense of where a child has come from

The child you are looking after may have been with you for a long time and you may feel that they fully understand why they are not able to be with their birth parents. Our experience is that children can continue for some time to be inquisitive about what happened in their early lives. These are questions which you may have to answer a number of times. As children grow and develop they will need to have information explained to them in different ways.

It is helpful if you can recognise when they are struggling and at these times try to create opportunities for them to talk about their confused thoughts and feelings. This can help them to build a clearer sense of their identity.

“My grandson is 15, and has been with us since he was 3. At the moment he is trying to make sense of his place in the world. I know he struggles, regarding his mum, the upbringing he has had and the choices his she has made through her life. He is struggling with himself and wants to know where he has come from.”

“He is quite a strong character and a very understanding young man and many others say he is quite grown up and all I can do is support him and be there to answer any questions honestly, putting his mind at ease.” **Colin**

Predict a good experience of someone/something new

Taking time to plan events and activities that can enable children to have positive experiences is worthwhile. Of course it is not always possible to predict a good outcome and the Resilience Framework recognises this. Resilience research draws our attention to the idea of “scaffolding experiences”. This involves trying as hard as you can to think of activities that have the potential to have a positive outcome and identifying what you or others might do to support these.

“In the past the relationship between my granddaughters has been very challenging and very difficult. They have experienced so many bad things together and their relationship had become strained. So I was thinking what would help them get along? So I got them to share a hamster called Adigo which means “beautiful girl” in African. Sharing this hamster has worked wonders. This pet has given them an opportunity to share something together to get to know each other as sisters.” **Martha**

Help the child to learn from new positive experiences. This may need lots of extra effort and flexibility on your part especially with planning and identifying what will work well, but the pay-off can create lots of great new opportunities.



Help your child make friends and mix with other children

When children get together they can do and say things to each other which are upsetting. Children can naturally fall in and out of relationships; it is a part of growing up. Being aware of and supporting your child through these challenges in a way that recognises the complexity of these relationships is more likely to build your child's confidence and security:

“My grandson has just turned six and I am working with him at the moment on how to deal with his temper. He can be playing with children and then he can just turn on them and be vicious all of a sudden. I am finding this really difficult. I know that his behaviour is unacceptable and it's got to stop, empathy is a huge thing and I am first working on this with him. I give him lots of hugs and kisses and tell him that I love him. I can understand that he must feel very angry with not having a normal mum and dad. I can see that this is why he is angry. By making him feel really loved I am helping create more healthy relationships with others.” Sarah

Helping the child form one positive relationship can have great impact on their confidence and self-esteem. Teaching them about friendship, how to behave appropriately and what makes a good friend can help your child make more positive relationships.

Top tips: Belonging

- » Due to past traumatic experience the child may have problems forming healthy relationships.
- » Tell the child that you love them and think of “fun” activities that you can enjoy together.
- » When the child is ready, talk to them about family relationship, think about how to frame this when you speak to the child. Use photos or draw a family tree so children can see where they fit in.
- » Enlist and create good healthy relationships, positive people and activities to play a major role in the child's life.
- » Help the child to reconnect with good experiences through family stories and photo albums.
- » Help the child make friends this will give them confidence and self esteem.

Learning

Make school life work as well as possible

Due to early experiences and current difficulties the children you are caring for may struggle in school. The child's past can impact on school life and sometimes the children can experience emotional, behavioural and social difficulties which interfere with their learning. This can affect their ability to learn and they can be at risk of underachieving. It is important to talk to their teachers so that the school knows what the child has been going through. Try to work with teachers on strategies that can help the child cope better at school as well.

“I have a word with my grandson's teachers. I explain at the beginning of each year why he is living with me. I tell them how to support him when he is stressed and explain that he is not behaving badly and that it is just his way of coping so the teachers know and make allowances.” Loretta

“My grandson was diagnosed emotionally three years behind his age so as a 15-year-old he acts like a 12-year-old and sometimes he can't help it if he misbehaves. The teachers at the school have worked hard at supporting him so that he is comfortable and safe in school and they are also very understanding of his behaviour.” Mary

“It is important to build a relationship with the school and this then helps and influences the relationship they have with their teachers and this can especially help if there are any behaviour problems so it is good to get school feedback.” Martha

Bullying

In our experience children will be asked questions about why they are living with grandparents and these questions can be challenging. Other children may pick on what they may see as vulnerability. It is important to be aware and notice signs of children being bullied. The school has a responsibility and needs to take action. The school your child goes to should have bullying, harassment, anti-racist and anti-homophobia policies. If you have any concerns it is important to talk with teachers, ask to see the policies, ask them to explain to you how the policies are implemented and what action is taken to ensure that the policies are working for every child.

“My girls have gone through a lot of bullying and had to deal with a lot of problems being brought up by their grandmother as well as having to deal with their skin colour....When the girls first started their secondary school racism was a problem so I spoke to the school and worked very hard to put a stop to it.” **Martha**

“My grandson has behavioural problems and this has meant he was bullied and ostracised by other children. They pick on him for being different. Don’t be afraid to insist the school takes action. If you are sure it is happening be assertive and stand your ground. When I went to the school they took it badly at first but the bullying continued and I insisted that staff needed to watch for bullying in the canteen and playground. I told them what actions they needed to take and I was insistent.” **Sarah**

It also helps if you can get to know the children your child is spending time with. There are different ways of doing this which can involve inviting children home after school, becoming involved in school activities and getting to know other parents:

“When my grandson was little I went on all his school class trips travelling with them on the bus so that the children all got to know me better as a person.” **Loretta**

Engage mentors for children



As a kinship carer it might be that you feel far removed from the child’s age and generation. School work and school life is likely to be very different to when you were at school. Finding a mentor to engage with the child could be essential. Finding someone who is a trusted adult who could be a friend to the child and help the child overcome barriers inside and outside of school could give the child some greatly needed support.

It is helpful to talk with teachers about the possibility of identifying someone to be a mentor and finding out from them about the mentoring schemes that are operating.

“My granddaughter has a learning mentor at school and she talks to that person about other kids who were causing her problems – I think it is good to have someone in school that can help your child with school problems. She also gets the learning mentor to help her with the homework, being a lot older I wouldn’t be able to help her with it.” **Martha**

“Homework is something I had to catch up on and to stop them falling behind I go to the learning centre which has maths tutors that help you help your child and helps bring family and school learning together.” **Mary**

If you are in contact with social workers and there is a support plan in place ‘Team Around the Child’ meetings can be a good place to discuss any concerns and make sure that children are getting the help they need.

“I go to Team Around the Child meetings. The school talks about how the girls are doing and if they need any help with being at school. I requested it two years after the court case ended. In the meetings we look at professional reports written by teachers of different subjects. The TAC helps with the generation gap and helps you talk to someone if you’re feeling disadvantaged.” **Martha**

Mentors can also have a role outside of school. Earlier we referred to the importance of children having adults in their lives who they can talk to. These adults can also be mentors in that they can help the child to learn new activities or support them to talk through things that worry them, things that they may not want to worry you with. It is important, however, that you know who these mentors are and also that you are confident that they are committed to helping your child:

“Granddad is a big part of my grandson’s life and has played a big part in raising him. I watch them play together – they are like two big kids.” **Loretta**

“It’s good for them to know we don’t have to know everything and that some things can be private. My granddaughter has a mentor who we call young mum and sometimes I say or she says ‘I think I should talk to young mum about it’.” **Martha**

Map out career or life plan

As a kinship carer it is important to give the child hope, aspirations and optimism while not over-pressurising them. As we said earlier, scaffolding can be important so the child has support and is not set up for failure. Often if a child has a difficult start in life it can be assumed that they would not be successful in school. Resilience research teaches us otherwise. Support which includes having hope and aspirations can help them to achieve and believe in themselves. Although learning does not have to be done in a formal way, it is important to affirm that education and schooling are important.

“Education is like a bank, you only get out what you put in. Enjoy school life as much as possible. You must do your homework on time, listen to the teachers. School is necessary; you have to work hard at school. I often say to my grandson that studying and going to school is his job.” **Loretta**

If your child has a particular interest, let teachers know and find out if there is a way in which this can be encouraged:

“My granddaughter is very good at sewing and textiles. I talked to her teachers about it and they got her involved in making costumes for the school play.” **Martha**

Highlight achievements

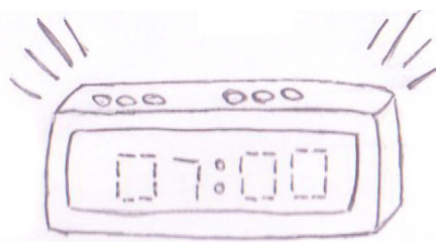
It is really important to notice children’s successes, their strength, talents and interests, as this builds their confidence. When children have had traumatic experiences early it is easy for them to believe they are not good enough. Help them to hold on to positive feelings; it is important they are given extra praise and affirmation.

“I make a point of creating a time and space every day for 10 minutes where I tell them what good people they are and remind them of all the good things they have done. Getting them to feel good about themselves pays off.” **Martha**

“I have noticed he has a new talent of swimming so I go swimming with him as much as possible.” **Sarah**

Help the child to organise themselves and develop life skills

It is important that children have support with organising their learning effectively and that they are able to get help with their school work.



Structure and routines which enable the child to have enough sleep, eat properly and get to school punctually will all support learning and will also help them to develop good relationships with other children.

“My girls set an alarm and they get up at 8 every day, I do not now have to wake them. I have taught them routine and structure and this has helped them cope better with everyday life.” **Martha**

“In the morning I don’t call him any more, he does his own alarm. He makes his own breakfast, own personal hygiene brushing his teeth. For years I had to ask him ‘have you brushed your teeth, have you had a shower?’” **Loretta**

The children you are caring for may have been brought up with chaos and a lack of structure. They may have not learnt simple life skills that other children their age may have learnt. As a kinship carer it is important to encourage children to learn to develop those skills. Children need to develop age-appropriate tasks such as good personal hygiene, keeping their clothes neat, how to make a simple meal, doing the washing up and how to tidy their bedroom.

Many kinship carers who are grandparents worry that, because of the age gap, they may not be able to continue to support their grandchild into adulthood. Helping the child to organise themselves, helping them to realise the importance of being able to ask others for help along the way, can be seen as part of a process of lifelong learning.

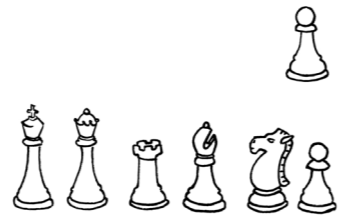
Top tips: Learning

- » Remember the child’s past and present experiences can impact on school life and affect their ability to learn so talk to the school about what the child has been through.
- » Notice any signs that the child you are caring for is being bullied at school; it is the school’s responsibility to take action if the child is being bullied.
- » Enlist school and everyday life mentors for the child.
- » Build the child’s confidence by noticing their successes, strengths and talents.
- » The children you are caring for may not have the skills to be able to organise themselves so get them support at school so that they can learn to take responsibility for small things.
- » The child you are caring for may have been brought up in chaos and lack of structure – encourage the child to learn to develop those age appropriate tasks.

Coping

Coping with the challenges of everyday life is likely to be more effective if both you and the child have skills that enable you to think more strategically about situations and alternative ways of sorting out problems. In this section kinship carers explain how they have developed their coping skills at the same time as helping children to develop different strategies for managing day-to-day concerns.

As well as taking on the challenges of becoming a kinship carer, members of the research group have experienced other events that led them to have to reconsider how they could do parenting. Shelly was involved in an accident which left her paralysed.



“When I became paralysed my whole world changed again and my son and I have benefited from that. It might sound strange, because it gave me time to stop, think and look at what was important and the most important thing was my children. Whereas before I was running and trying to do everything now we lie on the bed and play chess. It put in perspective what was more important, has given us a very special bond together. I had to look at life in a different way. At one stage I thought I could not be a parent again, but it made me think about parenting in a lot more detail and how I could do everything for his needs from a wheelchair and I can, that was fine”.

At this time Shelly called upon family and friends to help her. She recognised that both she and her son had to learn to think differently about their lives together. Coping can involve big changes for everyone and nobody can predict what challenges life will throw at them.

Helping children to learn coping strategies is part of the process of helping them manage day-to-day routines as well as unexpected events:

“My daughter just told my grandson that his dad was dead. He became angrier and started kicking out at me. I had to try to help him to cope with his anger. I gave him a cushion and encouraged him to kick and thump that. This was a safe way for him to let off steam. We did it together and it ended up being fun.” Sarah

Understand boundaries and keep within them

Setting and keeping boundaries can help the child feel safe and provide structure and routine. Boundaries are a way of setting limits that are consistent and help children know where they stand. It can be a hard process of setting clear boundaries, particularly with birth parents, but children really do feel better when they know where they stand. It’s worth trying to give both the child you are caring for and their birth parents clear rules that everyone sticks to.



Sometimes this can feel very harsh but hang in there and keep to the boundaries. Research says that firm, persistent and caring supervision from carers builds children’s resilience.

“First steps for taking on this responsibility of caring for the child and stepping into the unknown are boundaries, being loving and keeping to the rules – these are all essential. Don’t be too scared to put boundaries in place. You don’t have to compensate for their early childhood experiences. It is really important you guide them and put rules in place. Coming back from care they had been through so much and it was hard at first to be firm with them because they had been through so much. As a parent you have to be loving but firm. You have to be firm about behaviour. They constantly ask for things, ‘can I have that, can I have this?’. It is ok to say no.”

“I am managing to stay calm when things are brewing up. He has this magical way of winding me up and I think, I am the adult here and he is the child, don’t go there, so I have to constantly say if he winds me up, stay calm be in control. Anyway what I have done is re-introduce the star chart; it is working like a dream. Through the reward scheme thing we are having more fun respecting each other. Both calm, both happier, we have started having fun again. Sometimes the fun goes out of our relationship and it is all just me saying ‘no, don’t do that, do this and do that’.” Sarah

Being brave

Kinship carers often have to face very tricky and difficult situations. When you first become a kinship carer you can be put in situations that are very challenging and often scary. Feeling brave helps you feel more powerful and enables you to confront difficult and personal situations.

“At first you feel daunted, this is big and scary and you think if I had the boy for a little while they will go back home and their father might take responsibility. It is like denial. I never thought it would be for ever. Then suddenly I started to realise I was the person who would have to take full responsibility for the raising of this child and I felt a lot of fear.... but as the years go on it has got easier, even now when I am 70 years old and he is going to be a teenager it doesn’t scare me as much as when he was four when I never knew him but I do now.” **Loretta**

“Times have changed since I was a parent. I have had to be very brave to change the way I parent. I had to confront how I was as a parent and change that.” **Martha**

It is also important to encourage the child you are caring for to feel brave. This can help them overcome challenges, build their self-esteem and confidence as well as face uncomfortable scared feelings.

“ When he was having difficult times at school I used to put messages in his lunch box and cut his sandwiches into different shapes. I wrote about how loved he was and what I admired about him.” **Mary**

Solving problems

As a kinship carer you may at first feel that you are relentlessly solving problems. Sometimes it is helpful to face problems head on, other times it is good to just sit with not knowing all the answers, realising that not everything can be fixed straight away. It can be hard to take a break from all the worrying so enlisting help, sharing the problem and gaining support from friends and peers could take away some of the burden.

“You feel frightened when you’re not in control. You can’t say no because you don’t know what will happen to the child so you take on this big responsibility and you end up thinking about them and caring for them all the time. Often I am constantly solving lots of problems. I can remember when the social workers actually said you must take time for yourself, you cannot care for them constantly and you must give yourself a break.” **Martha**

Listening to the children themselves can be helpful; children will have their ideas about how to manage difficulties. Listening to them about their ideas about what can make things better can help you to see the situation from their perspective and can help you to find solutions you might otherwise not have thought about.

“This week I had some learning curves on how to cope with a problem that has come up. For me it goes back to the fact that I am not one generation but two away from my child, and was raised in a totally different environment. I think financial and emotional outlook and expectations are completely different from when I was a child. My grandson is young enough or smart enough to say look here Nanny, so then I am learning again. I was stuck in my way of living. This was difficult to come out of, I had to change a whole way of thinking and being.” **Loretta**

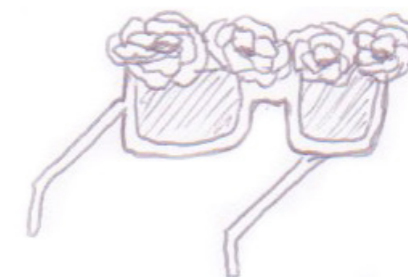
It is also important to encourage the child to problem solve. Get the child to assess the type and size of the problem and what they need to do to resolve it and who can help them if necessary.

“My granddaughter was really upset because her friend was not talking to her. I reminded her that sometimes she does not want to talk with her sister. This helped her to see that sometimes we all need space. So instead of following her friend around she went and sat on another table at school. Her friend came over and said: “I am sorry I was in a mood, I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Putting on rose-tinted glasses

Sometimes, in order to cope, it can help kinship carers and children to look at their world through rose-tinted glasses. This means putting a positive spin on things. This can help you feel more resilient. As Martha suggests, deliberately adopting a positive stance can help you feel stronger and manage life rather than always struggling to change it.

“I discovered what really gets me down is when I focus on the negative, I focus on the problem and I am not able to see the good. I now try to look at the good because sometimes the bad come in such a force that you are not able to see any of the good in a relationship. If I fail to see anything good the bad weighs you down and it wears you out. The good I saw with these little, little good things, if we build on that we get strength, then we feel that this thing is do-able, it can work.” **Martha**



Humour, relaxing and having a laugh together can really help:

“Humour – I make sure that I share some good banter with the boys. We all support different football teams and watch football together and share lots of friendly banter. It is a good way of letting off steam and forgetting about all the struggles and hard stuff.” **Colin**

As a kinship carer you can encourage the child you are caring for to put on rose-tinted glasses so that they notice the good things around them.

Foster their interests

As a kinship carer it is good to encourage the child to be able to forget about struggles and focus on doing fun things. Focusing on opportunities that can help the child succeed can improve the child’s self-esteem; it can also help them to feel that they have control in some areas of their life. It helps if you focus on activities that make the child feel good and this will help them feel happier as well as stronger and resilient.



Children can relax in activities they enjoy which helps strengthen their ability to enjoy their own company, as well as the company of others. Each member of the research group has been able to identify and support an activity which their child enjoys. The activities are different, but they all share the similar aim of helping the child to have fun at the same time as developing their knowledge and skills.

“Fishing is my grandson’s whole life. Even though it is June he is already saying what he wants for Christmas and it is a list of fishing equipment.” **Loretta**

“My granddaughter has enrolled in an athletic team – she is good at running. When she was at school she was the fastest at that school. Running gives her a real sense of achievement.” **Martha**

“My grandson is rebuilding a scooter out of parts of other scooters. He got an engine on eBay and is sourcing lots of free parts. It is something we like to do together.” **Colin**

“I like to encourage both my girls to do things other than academic so they can find other interests and other skills outside of school that they like to do for fun.” **Martha**

“I got my grandson to join karate. It was a new experience for him and he was forced to make new friends and he comes home and shows me the moves”.

Sarah

Calming down and self-soothing

Often when caring for the child you may feel challenged to the extreme and it is important to remain calm when you feel very stressed. Remaining calm can be a way of modelling good behaviour to the child. It is worth trying to get your child to notice when, where and why they are upset; helping them to notice their own feelings is key to helping them to think of ways in which they can express themselves, without feeling out of control.



“I tell him to go upstairs right now, I can’t have you around me. I say you go upstairs and think about it and then he stomps upstairs banging the door. It works. You get space from them, when you are both angry no one will win. Lots of times I was wrong I say sorry to him. He can say the same and it is ok to get things wrong.” **Loretta**

“With my grandson I give him three minutes. I sit and listen for three minutes and then I make my point for three minutes. I am not aggressive, I know that just fuels anger. He is learning from me how you can control your anger and he is starting to calm down and is turning a corner. As a kinship carer I have learnt how to do this. Before I never used to leave anything alone, I’d pick at it at the back of my head. I’d nit-pick and never let go, the argument would fester in my brain and when the discussion was over I would bring it up again. I’ve now learnt to just leave it. We had our three minutes each and then that is the end of the argument.” **Colin**

“I find that running a bath, turning the lights down and putting lots of bubbles in the water really helps my grandson. He relaxes and sometimes nearly falls asleep”. **Sarah**

Tomorrow is another day

As a Kinship Carer you may feel like you are pushed to the extreme, especially when you are having an awful day. When this happens it is good to remember that tomorrow things will be different. This could help you feel less overwhelmed and gain some inner strength. As a carer this could help you to make what Angie and colleagues call small “resilient moves” and turn what they refer to as a “negative chain reaction” into a positive one.

“I remind myself before I go to bed that tomorrow is another day, to find the good and not dwell on the bad things. I always think that tomorrow will be better and forget about anything rubbish that happened today.” **Martha**

Be a role model to the child you are caring for so that they see that tomorrow is another day. Be calm, put on rose-tinted glasses and get them to see that something positive can come out of something negative.

“I try to be a role model to my girls. When the neighbour was angry at me for complaining about her dog pooing in our communal garden, I kept quiet and she went on and on. I said I just came to talk to you and I thought we could sort it out. If anything happened to you I will be at your door before anyone else. We need to respect each other and support each other in times of emergency and need so I don’t want to fall out with you. The neighbour went quiet and left. The girls were both there and they said the way I dealt with it was magic.” **Martha**

Lean on others when necessary

Enlisting and leaning on others could greatly assist and further aid you in your role as kinship carer. Leaning on others for support is about giving yourself the opportunity to take a step back; it can help you to get a bit of distance from the situation, so you can come at it afresh.



“I went to America. I was in a bad way, quite depressed, was not motivated and so my mum and my aunty who lives in San Francisco decided to buy me a ticket to America. They sent me over there to get some healing and get out of my depression. I had a wonderful time and did all sorts of brilliant things, walks along the beach in the morning, walks in the forest seeing those redwood trees.”

“When I returned home I realised that those women love and care for me . It made me believe that I could do everything. What they were doing was trying to get me better out of love and they saved me from going under.” **Sarah**

“There have been times when I felt how hard it has been being away from my people. I wrote a list of all the people I had, all the friends, professionals, judges, social workers... it gave me my strength back, I could see all the people who can help me or have helped me.” **Martha**

“Family and friends meetings are great. I can go there when I have had bad times and I can express it and they understand and know exactly what I am going through. It really helps me. It is our family – they know what we are talking about. They have lived it.” **Loretta**

Encourage the child you are caring for to lean on others. They may, like Mary’s grandson, have a sibling who can help by sharing their own experiences:

“We are trying to get him to talk with his brother, he gets on well with the two teachers that my youngest grandson has a problem with so I asked his brother to speak to him on the bus, not bending his ear, but saying to him, ‘have you got Mr So-and-so today, I really like Mr So-and-so, what do you have a problem with?’” **Mary**

You can draw a picture of a hand and ask children to name the fingers as people they know, people that they feel they can talk to or do fun things with. Sometimes it might be helpful to ask someone you trust, who is slightly separate from the family to talk with your child.

Top tips: Coping

- » Don’t be afraid to set clear boundaries with birth parents – give both the child you are caring for and their birth parents clear rules that everyone sticks too.
- » Sometimes face problems head on, other times just sit with not knowing and realise everything can’t be fixed.
- » Adopt a positive stance –this can help you feel stronger.
- » Focus on opportunities to help the child succeed.
- » Encourage the child to notice when, where and why they are upset and understand their own role in what has happened.
- » When you are feeling pushed to the extreme or overwhelmed take a breath and remember tomorrow is another day.
- » Don’t be scared to enlist others to give you support.

Core self

Core self is about understanding our personal ideas, beliefs and assumptions. Focusing on understanding who you are, and building internal and personal strength can help you approach life as a kinship carer more resiliently. An understanding of core self is also important for helping the child to develop and recognise their own personal strengths.

Instil a sense of hope

Hope can keep you going when everything seems to be falling apart. Hope helps you hold on to the possibility of change and the anticipation that things are going to get better. Hope can also help you manage and survive difficult and challenging times.



“As a kinship carer you first learn to be a parent to your grandchild after parenting your own child. At first you feel hopelessness. Where did I go wrong? How come it happened to me? You feel lots of strange feelings. It takes time before there is some glimmer of hope and without hope I think I could not manage it. We are doing what we are doing because there is a glimmer of hope things are going to be better. These children are going to be better children. The child is going to grow and develop into a better adult, we become their hope, they have been let down by their parents and so now we are their new HOPE.” **Martha**

Help the child you are caring for see their life as having the potential to change and to progress, help them see that their life is getting better and that they are overcoming barriers:

“My grandson is sometimes overwhelmed with the thought that because both his parents are addicted to drugs he will be the same. I reassure him that we can all get on differently and that it is possible to have a different life. We have a family tree and I point out all the people who have done well. He is proud that we have a ship’s captain in the family.” **Colin**

Teach your child to understand other people’s feelings

Kinship carers play a vital role in teaching children empathy. One of the fundamental roles of being a kinship carer is to help the child to develop the ability to understand other people’s feelings.

Being able to tune into other people’s feelings helps them to get along, have good relationships and feel welcome in the wider world.

Children with empathy can care about, and feel confident and happy in, other people’s company. Often children learn about other people’s feelings by having their own feelings fully understood and appropriately responded to.



As children grow up, in order for them to know themselves and feel good about themselves, they need to feel loved and secure. This gives them confirmation that they are cherished, valued and appreciated. This is why it is so important to develop a loving relationship with the child, one where you communicate openly what you think and feel and this will in turn encourage the child to explore their thoughts and feelings. This will help the child establish a good sense of self-worth.

“I have learnt to think before talking especially when it concerns the kids. Last night our grandson thought that me and Mary were rowing. We don’t row, we don’t just row. I explain we are having a discussion talking a bit louder but not rowing. I make sure we don’t raise our voices and stay calm. I’ve changed my tactics and I am calmer when I speak about emotions.” **Colin**

“I had to teach my grandson about other people’s emotions. If he had a temper tantrum and kicked me I had to act that it really hurt and wait for him to come over to me and comfort me. I learnt this from this from his reception teacher. She said it was important to show him that he hurts when he kicks people. When we are outside and walking if we see a child crying I say to him ‘what do you think that boy must be feeling?’” **Sarah**

Help the child know themselves

As a kinship carer try to encourage children to spot their own strengths and weaknesses and notice what’s important to them; this helps them to develop their own strong sense of identity. Give them feedback and provide children with opportunity to recognise, accept and talk about their feelings safely.

When the child is ready it is important to help the child gain awareness and insight into problems their family may have experienced. Learning about themselves and how to make and sustain relationships with others plays an important part in helping them become more resilient.

“My youngest granddaughter sometimes has really bad tempers and when that starts it can go on for two days. She will fight with her sister and she will just say no. So I just sit her down and talk to her. I try to talk to her about the good things in her. I say to her you are very kind, you are helpful and make friends easily. So much I see the difficulty, I made a point three times in the week. I called her to my bedroom and spoke to her about the good things in her and it really worked very well.” **Martha**

“Being open with the child to a certain level also builds their trust in you. When they know you are going to be truthful they know they can ask you anything. I have said if I find anything out about my middle son’s mother then I will tell him immediately. He feels reassured that if I know the answer I will tell him. I will not lie. I will not be dishonest and that builds resilience because they know they have got that back-up of people who are going to be honest and support them and be truthful with them.” **Mary**

Help child take responsibility for themselves

Encouraging the child to make independent decisions, as much as possible can help build the child’s self-esteem and allows them to develop as an individual.

This builds on the child knowing themselves. It is helping them see that they can have an impact on the things and people around them rather than assuming things happen to them all the time. Learning to take responsibility allows the child to feel a sense of usefulness and personal power. Taking responsibility can help them understand that they can have the power to make choices and decisions in their life.

As a kinship carer you need to set realistic goals that fit with the child’s age and ability to direct their responses and shape their own worlds. Start by concentrating on a few things that are achievable for their age and level of ability.

“My youngest came home from school on Tuesday and had been put on report. He did not think that he should be put on report. He cannot control his temper. He has got all those verbal skills and uses them at inappropriate times. He came in and was really angry. I said ‘the only person who can change is you, you know what you should be doing and what you should not be doing. Why can’t you bite your tongue, keep it to yourself until the end of the lesson and then go to the teacher and say actually what you said I disagree with instead of shouting out, being disrespectful and rude?’” **Mary**

“I gave my grandson the opportunity to make a decision. I asked him, ‘do you want to get the train up to see your dad on your own?’ He said ‘No Nanny, I am not ready yet’.” **Loretta**

As a kinship carer it is important to take responsibility for your own feelings, choices and decisions. You can make decisions too about how much you worry about the child. Together both you and the child can work on taking responsibility. When you are feeling stressed and emotional try to take some time for yourself. It is important that you have someone to share your experiences with and space to manage your own feelings about what’s going on.

“I have found giving him more independence has been hard. It has been a fine balance. I know I need to cut back a bit and learn to give him more independence. I’m finding it hard. I didn’t take time to do it with my daughter, how much to give and not to give freedom. Being a single parent, it is hard making the decision. I have, however, accepted I can’t be perfectly right.” **Sarah**

“There are times when I have felt very angry and I have had to say to him ‘just go to your room. I can’t control my anger. I can’t deal with this now – go away’. He is usually angry as well and I think the space of 10 minutes is good for you both to calm down. If I am wrong I go and apologise and if he is wrong, he apologises.” **Loretta**

Foster their talents

As a Kinship Carer it is important to foster children’s talents, to build up the qualities and good points they already have and help maximize talent and potential. This is a way to begin to experience some choice in their life, a sense of achievement and competence. Capturing any talent, gift or ability can be used to their own personal advantage and helps the child become more confident and resilient.

“My grandson naturally loves drawing. Out of the whole school, he won a drawing competition and won a ticket to the cinema. He was given the ticket in assembly. He stood up and everyone clapped. The poster he made was shown in the foyer of the cinema. He could see how proud I was. I encourage him now to draw and this really helps boost his self-esteem.” **Sarah**

“I really encourage my grandson to develop his fishing talent. He’s loves it. We go every weekend. He has made friends with an older fisherman who has commented that he is a really well-mannered, lovely little boy and very knowledgeable about fishing. Fishing has really helped improve his confidence and self-esteem. He is a talented fishing man and catches fish a grown man can catch.” **Loretta**

There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems – use them. Sometimes it is good just to try something different. You may need to do it long enough to judge whether it benefits you or the child. You can choose whether to carry on trying it or leave it and try something else. There really are situations where tried and tested remedies can make all the difference. Remember you might only need them for a short while.

“For four years the girls went to see a child therapist. She was very good and useful. She gave me parenting tips. I learnt a professional way of handling things. Parenting in England is very different from Uganda. The child therapist helped me develop my relationship with them. When I was growing up in Uganda you had no quality time and you would rarely get a parent to sit and talk to you. I learnt just simple things on how to spend time each day talking to the girls, encouraging them to talk about their feelings and how their day has been. I now feel confident I can work on my relationship with the children.” **Martha**

Don't forget about yourself

“I went to see a child psychotherapist on my own about my grandson. I learnt how to handle his temper issues. The child psychotherapist taught me to imagine what it would be like to be that child and to understand age-appropriate boundaries and rules. I learnt that you should not overload a child with rules and that you should talk about rules together and agree on them and agree what the consequences will be. I learnt which rules are important and not important.” **Sarah**

Top tips: Core self

- » Teach the child to recognise their own and other people's feelings.
- » Try to communicate openly what you think and feel as this will in turn encourage the child to explore their thoughts and feelings.
- » Help the child develop their own strong sense of identity, provide feedback and the opportunity to recognise, accept and talk about feelings safely.
- » When the child is ready it is important to talk to them and allow them to gain insight into problems their family may have experienced.
- » Take responsibility for your own feelings, choices and decisions.
- » Try to avoid projecting your emotions on to the child you are caring for. Times when you are stressed and emotional need to be kept separate from your role as a kinship carer.
- » Make sure you have someone to share your experiences with and space to manage your own feelings. Support groups can be really helpful.

Getting started with the Resilience Framework

Here are some top tips for giving the Resilience Framework a go. They are based on ideas developed by Kim Aumann and Angie Hart and you can read more about them in: **Aumann, K. & Hart, A. (2009) Helping Children with Complex Needs Bounce Back. London: Jessica Kingsley.**

Practise

Practise being creative. Start small and try just one thing at a time. Strike a balance between taking the risk to give a new idea a go and choosing something that is reasonably achievable. This way you are more likely to have some success which can often encourage us to keep on trying.

Experiment

The child you are caring for won't know whether or not you feel confident about what you're doing, so pretend you are! This allows you to test out new ideas and possibilities even though you're unsure about the outcome. Remember the Resilience Framework can't do any damage.

Expect the unexpected

If you want something to change then be specific, but also remain open to new opportunities, new information and things going a little slower (or quicker) than you might have hoped.

Change your focus

Aim to have a few ideas and strategies up your sleeve. This takes pressure off you if you're not feeling up to the original plan. It gives you other options to try out if necessary.

Pick your moments

Decide the best time to give your new idea a go – think about when it's likely to suit your child, and you, the best.

Listen to your children

No matter how old your child is, you have to work at their pace. Use your child’s response to help you but remember, sometimes things get worse before they get better, especially if it’s annoying behaviour you’re working on. It can often be important they understand what you’re doing, as it’s their chance to learn what you’re teaching and encouraging.

Take it easy on yourself

It’s reasonable given the nature of what you’re doing, and the huge but different demands made of parents and professionals, to build in breaks and rewards and incentives. Looking after yourself helps to hold the resilient approach in mind.

Notice the little things

Take time to think about the little shifts and achievements. In the context of parenting children with complex needs, they might be huge. Change can come so slowly that it’s actually a real skill to notice it. Or it may be that something hasn’t got worse, when it might have done if you hadn’t stepped in.

Some final thoughts

Every kinship care family is unique and everyone starts their journey from a different place. In this resource our aim has been to share some of our experiences of learning to do kinship care in the best way possible for our children, for ourselves and for other members of our family. The doing of kinship care involves being committed to the tasks of caring and recognising that situations are constantly changing as children grow older and the everyday pattern of life throws up predictable as well as unpredictable events. For us as kinship carers the experience has been rewarding. We have learnt so much and we have had lots of fun along the way.

Learning about the Resilience Framework has built our confidence. It has enabled us to take a step back, particularly in complex situations, to think about different ways of doing things, and we have recognised the importance of asking for help before things get too tough. In the next few pages are details of some of the services and organisations that we have found useful.

We hope that this guide will be a helpful resource for you. For further information contact Lindsay Hill and the kinship carers info@boingboing.org.uk

Appendix 1: The Resilience Framework

Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2012 – adapted from Hart & Blincow 2007 www.boingboing.org.uk					
	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
SPECIFIC APPROACHES	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong Help child/YP understand their place in the world	Make school/college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them Being brave	Instil a sense of hope
	Enough money to live	Tap into good influences	Engage mentors for children/YP	Solving problems	Support the child/YP to understand other people’s feelings
	Being safe	Keep relationships going	Map out career or life plan	Putting on rose-tinted glasses	Help the child/YP to know her/himself
	Access & transport	The more healthy relationships the better Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope		Fostering their interests	Help the child/YP take responsibility for her/himself
	Healthy diet	Get together people the child/YP can count on	Help the child/YP to organise her/himself	Calming down & self-soothing	
	Exercise and fresh air	Responsibilities & obligations	Highlight achievements	Remember tomorrow is another day	Foster their talents
	Enough sleep	Focus on good times and places Make sense of where child/YP has come from		Lean on others when necessary	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
	Play & leisure	Predict a good experience of someone or something new		Have a laugh	
		Make friends and mix with other children/YPs	Develop life skills		
NOBLE TRUTHS					
ACCEPTING		CONSERVING	COMMITMENT	ENLISTING	

Appendix 2: National and local organisations

Family Rights Group: a charity in England and Wales that advises families whose children are involved or need children’s services because of welfare needs or concerns. The charity provides information on family and friends care, including information on Special Guardianship Orders, becoming a foster carer and financial advice. The Family Rights Group can give you information about local support groups in your area.

www.frg.org.uk | 08088010366

Grandparents’ Association: an organisation that provides advice and support to grandparents about caring for or having contact with their grandchildren.

www.grandparents-association.org.uk | 01279 444964

Grandparents Plus: a national charity which champions the role of grandparents and wider family in children’s lives especially when they take on the role in difficult circumstances. They have recently published a Kinship Care Guide for England which provides information on where to go to for legal advice and financial information. Grandparent’s Plus also publishes a quarterly newsletter.

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk | 03001 237015

Citizen’s Advice: provides free and confidential advice on financial issues. It also provides specific advice for grandparents.

www.adviceguide.org.uk

Coram Children’s Legal Centre: provides free independent legal advice to children, parents and carers. Their Child Law Advice Line provides information covering all aspects of law and policy affecting children. | 08088 020 008

Local authority children’s services: are obliged to set up special guardianship support services in their area, although this does not mean that they have to provide support to every child under a Special Guardianship Order. The support services should include counselling, advice, information and financial support. Financial support is given to enable a person to be a special guardian when the local authority considers it to be beneficial to the child’s welfare. It is paid at the discretion of the local authority. For information on the services available in your area, including local support groups you can contact:

Brighton and Hove Children’s Services:
www.brighton-hove.gov.uk | 01273 290000

East Sussex Children’s Services:
www.eastsussex.gov.uk Helpline | 03546 080192

West Sussex Children’s Services:
www.westsussex.gov.uk

Sources of Financial Support: you are likely to be entitled to certain benefits such as Child Tax Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Guardian’s Allowance. The Family Rights Group has helpful factsheets on its website.

Amaze: gives information, advice and support to parents of children with special needs and disabilities in Brighton and Hove.
www.amazebrighton.org.uk | 01273 772289

Child Friendly Brighton: is a website that provides information about resources and activities for children in Brighton and Hove
www.childfriendlybrighton.co.uk

Appendix 3: Glossary of terms

Special Guardianship: is a court order which says that a child will live with someone who is not their parent on a long-term basis and gives parental responsibility to that person. It is similar to a residence order although it is stronger.

Residence Order: is a court order which says that a child will live with someone who is not their parent on a long-term basis and gives parental responsibility to that person.

Looked After: if your child or a child you know of is being “looked after” they will be being cared for by Children’s Services. A child who is “looked after” may be placed by Children’s Services with relatives or friends, unrelated foster carers or in a residential unit.

Team Around the Child: A Team Around the Child meeting, sometimes referred to as a TAC, is a meeting between family members and professionals that could help you and your child. The meeting will look at ways in which you and your child can be supported.

Further information about these terms and guidance about parental responsibility can be found on the Family Right’s website:

www.frg.org.uk

References:

There are two books which we have referred to in this guide which you might find helpful:

Hart, A. Blincow, D. with Thomas, H. (2007) Resilient Therapy. Hove: Routledge.

Aumann, K. & Hart, A. (2009) Helping Children with Complex Needs Bounce Back. London: Jessica Kingsley.