



Kinship Care COVID-19 Impact Report

Context

Tracking kinship carers' experiences and concerns during COVID-19

Informed by our frontline work advising and supporting kinship families, and a series of surveys of kinship carers, we are building a picture of the experiences of kinship carers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Already, we can see that their concerns and needs are evolving, so we are adapting our services and sharing findings regularly with local authorities, the government and others, to help shape policy and practice responses that reflect the needs of kinship carers through lockdown and beyond.

Why us?

Grandparents Plus has unrivalled breadth and depth of engagement with kinship carers. Our project workers have ongoing and trusted relationships with kinship carers, supporting them in their homes, communities and in support groups. Our advice team help 15 kinship carers a day, guiding them through a huge range of complex personal and practical issues. Our community of over 7,000 kinship carers engage with us and each other through regular consultations and social media.

How we use the information gathered through our consultations and wider work

Grandparents Plus is responding to kinship carers' concerns and experiences, by developing advice, guidance and support to meet them. Our new **Kinship Response** service, currently available in 58 local authorities, offers 1-1 advice and support and peer support to special guardians. This is delivered by our expert project and advice workers, but is now online and over the phone. We are supporting carers to set up and use these new technologies to get support and stay connected.

We also use this information to inform and strengthen our communications with decision-makers and in the media to make sure that the issues facing kinship carers are raised at local and national levels and help ensure that kinship families get the recognition and support they need.



Summary

Kinship carer COVID-19 consultation #2: May 2020

Date of survey: 1-11 May

Number of respondents: 169

Summary of key concerns

- Kinship carers are exhausted and not receiving the help and support they need
- Many children in kinship care are now feeling the impact of the lockdown restrictions and this is affecting their mental health and well being
- There is huge concern about the easing of restrictions too early causing a second wave of COVID-19



How this has changed from first COVID-19 consultation #1: March 2020

Our first COVID-19 consultation was carried out on 18 March, a few days before lockdown began on 23 March. At this time many kinship carers with health concerns were already self-isolating but schools were still open. There was considerable anxiety around what would happen to the carer if they contracted COVID-19 and who would look after the children. The results of this survey can be [read here](#).

Our most recent report was sent out on 1 May with responses coming in over the first two weeks of May. At this time the lock-down was into its 6th and 7th weeks and suggestions about easing restrictions and schools opening to more pupils were starting to become more pronounced.

The results of this survey show how kinship carers are coping with continued restrictions, their exhaustion, their concerns over the well-being of the children in their care and their practical difficulties of home-schooling. There was also a return to the anxiety felt in the first survey of the impact of COVID-19 on them and their families if the easing of lockdown happened too soon.

Key concerns

Kinship carers concerns and experiences during COVID-19 lockdown: May 2020

Exhaustion

Many carers are now feeling exhausted from juggling caring responsibilities. Some feel their own mental health is suffering, with many feeling isolated. However, 53% of respondents aren't receiving any additional support beyond that offered by family and friends.

"I'm exhausted mentally and physically."

"I'm not coping well, what with my husband being tested positive [with COVID-19], and the little one been poorly. It just seems to get me down; throughout the day, trying to do things around the house and with children. I am usually a strong person, but even this has pushed me to the limits. I can see the end of this coming, so I am really forcing myself to bounce back. Loneliness is hard."

"Finding the energy to keep up with a 7 year old and a 2 year old non-stop."

"The main thing for me is having no 'me time'. Each day just becomes another day. My granddaughter is 5 and needs a lot of attention. I get so tired. As time has gone on she doesn't want to do any school work. Some days are better than others."

Children's mental health

Kinship carers have started to see the impact the restrictions are having on their children's mental health; especially on those who have already experienced trauma. Children have lost routines and, for some, therapeutic support has stopped abruptly. Some carers described children's deteriorating behaviour, including incidences of violence towards the carer, an issue that is emerging more regularly in our support groups.

16% expressed concern over the well-being of their children. Of these, 9% were concerned about mental health and 5% about keeping the children entertained.

"All five children are arguing a lot, and as a consequence one is starting to get violent and started attacking me physically (at one point) and often verbally. Before when things got too much for him, he would go to his dad's, but he is unable to do that at the moment."

"The oldest is finding the isolating and the stress of producing school work very difficult. This has impacted his self-esteem and is adding to his anxiety. The younger one is already receiving therapy."

"I am disabled with 8 children living with me and my partner and there is a lot of behavioural issues with kids fighting and arguing. [T]hey range from 15 to 2-years-old including a set of twins. [I]t's having an impact on all of us being on lockdown."

Key factors

Kinship carers concerns and experiences during COVID-19 lockdown: May 2020

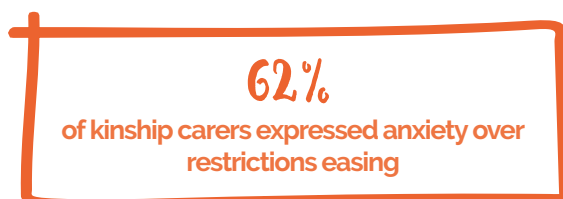
Home-schooling

21% of kinship carers mentioned that home-schooling was causing them stress, with issues such as not feeling able to home-school, the children not wanting to engage, a lack of the technical equipment needed and worry that the children would fall behind.

"My 14-year-old granddaughter who has emotional problems due to early years trauma refuses to help or cooperate with anything including her school work."

"Finding it hard to get our grandson to do any school work and we can't understand the work the school sends out to help him."

"I never realised how much a laptop and printer [are] invaluable until now. Online free education no good unless you can access it and print off what you need... I don't have this technology for my granddaughter so she is disadvantaged for home learning."



Worry over restrictions easing

When it came to the easing of restrictions, there is an overwhelming sense of anxiety. 62% of kinship carers mentioned this. Carers fear that if done too soon, there will inevitably be a second spike in cases of COVID-19 with the risk that poses not only to their own health but also the impact a second lockdown might have on the well-being of their children.

While some carers are positive, looking forward to their children being able to socialise again and get back into a routine, the vast majority described feeling anything from concerned to terrified.

"I suffer from a condition that puts me at risk. I'm worried about the children's return to school."

"Terrified of easing lockdown, granddaughter back at school puts us at extreme risk. She was concerned that she would be responsible for us contracting the virus before lockdown, which was extremely worrying for her."

Key factors

Kinship carers concerns and experiences during COVID-19 lockdown: May 2020

Impact on children of disruption to contact arrangements

60% of kinship carers told us that contact arrangements had been affected by the current restrictions. This continues to be a big worry for them. Many have had to suspend contact altogether which is affecting those children who benefitted from relationships with other family. Others are staying in contact online.

"Our Granddaughter's contact with her parents has had to be suspended because she is in lockdown with me. If she attends she cannot return here until the present situation ends. She cannot stay with her mother due to children's services concerns and her father refuses to have her."

"We've only had 1 video call from our granddaughter that's in care since this virus started. [W]e normally have her for sleepovers each month [so] we feel cut off from her and its upsetting for our grandson that lives with us."

"Now a lot better as we have a contact worker joining in with facetime so calls can be listened to properly."

Financial concerns

Worry about finances continue to be a problem for 5% of carers, with 7% asking for financial support and advice.

"Financially I'm finding things difficult as I've recently had to retire due to ill health."

"It's a struggle emotionally and financially we have only got 1 laptop between 8 kids so school work is difficult"

Disruption to court proceedings

13 carers told us they were in court proceedings started before the lockdown. Eight were still able to access legal advice but five were not. This has affected everything from security of placement to allowances.

"We have been granted a child placement order and had started our assessment for a SGO. However, since the beginning of this pandemic we have not heard from our social worker. Understandable as services have been diverted to protect children at risk. However, this has delayed any possible [SGO]."

Conclusion

What needs to happen

Kinship carers have specific and urgent concerns and needs at this time. They were already a vulnerable and poorly supported group. The COVID-19 makes them even more vulnerable; in terms of their health, pressure of caring for children, increased isolation and reduced access to local peer support. They are scared for their families and for what might happen. This situation is likely to continue for many months yet and even as restrictions ease, many carers will need to maintain social isolation for some time to come. Kinship carers need tailored advice, practical resources and support from people they trust.



Recommendations for local authorities and national government

1. Fund the voluntary sector to extend existing frontline services to provide tailored advice, practical resources and support to as many kinship carers as practicable.
2. Designate a hardship fund so frontline workers can get essential items to kinship families as quickly as possible, for example beds, food, laptops for children.
3. Guarantee respite for kinship carers and special guardians who fall ill with symptoms if they want/need it.
4. Local authorities should pause all means tested financial assessments – and communicate this to carers to reduce anxiety about finances.
5. Provide Emergency welfare benefits for all kinship carers and special guardians – we suggest £50 a week – to reduce financial pressures.
6. Consider that all children not living with parents should be classed as children in need under s.17 Children Act 1989 and should receive LA support if they require it.



Grandparents Plus is the national kinship care charity.

Our free support for kinship carers include a specialist advice service and kinship community of over 7,000 kinship carers. Our kinship carer support programmes are delivered in partnership with local authorities in the North East, Yorkshire, the Midlands and London.

Our work will continue to be informed by kinship carers' experiences. To discuss kinship carers' COVID-19 concerns and practical solutions, please contact Lucy Peake, Chief Executive, Grandparents Plus via lucy.peake@grandparentsplus.org.uk.

Grandparents Plus Advice Service: Call us on **0300 123 7015**. Our advice service is open Monday to Friday from 9.30am-3.30pm with additional evening opening hours on Tuesday and Thursday from 8-9.30pm.



[grandparentsplus.org.uk](https://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk)



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