



ND Child Welfare Supervision

THE IMPORTANCE OF KINSHIP: MAKING CONNECTIONS

According to Annie E. Casey Kid's Count, in 2020-2022, the United States averaged 2.5 million children being raised in kinship families over the three year period. The reasons for children living with kin are multiple: substance abuse, incarceration, military deployment, severe disability, deportation, teen pregnancy, or death of a parent. Children being raised by grandparents or extended family is not a new concept, in fact, this has been taking place for generations. So, why is there a new emphasis in the child welfare world to look to family now more than ever?

In the past, children were placed with extended family because there may not have been other options. Now, we know that children that are placed with kinship families have better outcomes overall, when compared to those that are placed with a nonrelative foster care provider. Children placed with kin experience:

1. Increased Stability: there are fewer placement changes, they tend to have better educational outcomes and are less likely to reenter the child welfare system.
2. Permanency Sooner: according to the 2021 AFCARS report, 34% of children adopted from foster care are adopted by relatives.
3. Better behavioral and mental health outcomes.
4. A greater sense of belonging and acceptance.
5. Better connections to siblings and extended family.
6. A great preservation of the child's identity as well as connections to their communities and extended family.

Adapted from: "Great Things about Kinship/Grandfamilies" retrieved 7-7-25 from: <https://www.gksnetwork.org/resources/6-great-things-about-kinship-grandfamilies/> ; "Fact Sheet: Children Thrive in Grandfamilies" retrieved 8-1-25 from: <https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2023/05/23-Children-Thrive-in-Grandfamilies.pdf>

Connecting to Kin Families.

Child Welfare involvement can be overwhelming and stressful for families even in the best of situations. Families will be more likely to engage in services for themselves and for the children they are caring for if we first forge a relationship and build a connection. Remember that Kinship families need as much, or more, support than licensed foster care providers.

1. **Be Intentional-** Listen to the family history and their apprehension concerning service providers and the difficulties that they have faced. Kin caregivers often think that they need to present in a manner that conveys that they do not need help, thinking that if they need help, there is the chance that you won't place the children with them, or continue the placement if they ask for assistance.
2. **Listen without judgement, be curious:** Ask families how becoming a caregiver to the child(ren) has changed their life, ask them about the adjustments that have come with the placement and what their support system looks like.
3. **Meet them where they are at.** If the family has immediate concerns around food or clothing, work to fill that gap. Build trust in small gestures.
4. **Say what you mean, mean what you say.** Build trust by demonstrating follow through.
5. **Do not take their frustrations personally.** Families have had a mirage of disappointments before we reach their door.
6. **Continue to reach out even when they are not.** Families can benefit just by knowing that you are available and willing to assist if, and when, they want help. Remember: if there is a case open through foster care or in home, we must be making home visits and meeting with providers and the children placed with them on a monthly basis. These contacts under state policy need to be face to face and during that time there should be a thorough assessment of needs for all parties.
7. **Value their time.** Families with limited resources often spend a great deal of time, arranging for transportation, getting to appointments, etc. Before making a referral, ensure that the information you provide them is correct, check into any income restrictions for qualification, and assist the family with the referral itself.
8. **Understand that your approach to build trust will vary from family to family** - Each family comes with their own story as well as their own cultural background.
9. **Be honest about what you can and cannot share with the family.** If there is information that you cannot share due to confidentiality, let families know that versus having them wonder why you are avoiding the question.
10. **Ensure that the kinship providers have the supports needed in order to provide care.** There are a number of resources at your fingertips on the [KinshipND website](https://www.kinshipnd.org). Use this to inform yourself of the resources but also share that website for families.

Adapted from: "Building Trust", retrieved on 8-10-25 from: <https://www.gksnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/LC5-Building-Trust.pdf>

"Keeping Kids Close: Kinship-ND Building Community Connections"

will be at the North Dakota Behavioral Health and Children and Family Services Conference in October. This panel will include kinship providers, child welfare, as well as a representative from the community. Come and learn more about the kinship program and how it can assist many different families in our communities as well as to hear directly from the providers and the workers on how impactful the program can be! The panel will be held on Wednesday morning -Don't miss it!!

Becoming an Ally for Families

Being an ally means actively supporting and advocating for a marginalized group, using one's privilege to promote equity and inclusion. It involves understanding the challenges faced by the group and working to dismantle systems of oppression, not just offering passive support. What a great way to define the way that we as a system can support children that are in care and their families or origin.

Katie Biron, a prior foster care provider, adoptive parent, and a foster care and adoption consultant, believes strongly in being an ally for children and their birth families. Katie shares her story about her adoption experience and her experience of being a foster care provider and how she struggled initially with creating a connection with the children's family, and why. She talks about how creating these connections has impacted her family in positive ways and how those relationships have assisted in creating permanency for the children.

Katie is a firm believer that when children witness the important adults in their lives working together in partnership, everyone wins. Do you want to learn more about Katie's experience and how we can approach this with foster care providers and adoptive parents? Check out Katie's story at [Fostering Connections](#) or watch a video presentation here featuring Katie and her story: [Fostering Connections with Katie Biron](#). Lastly, there are many resources on her website where we can learn more how to build and support those relationships in our role as a case worker. Katie will also be joining us in Bismarck in October for our Behavioral Health and Children and Family Services Conference. We encourage you to come learn more from Katie about the importance of these connections and how we can support them in our work- everyone wins!

Join us in Bismarck in October!



Katie Biron is a child welfare advocate, writer, and consultant with nearly 20 years of experience in foster care and adoption. She will be sharing firsthand experience as both a foster caregiver, and an adoptive mother, and about how we can help caregivers and parents of children in out-of-home care build and navigate child-centered relationships. Her workshop, "*Fostering Connections for Families – Tips for Navigating Parent/Caregiver Relationships in Foster Care*," will be during the Tuesday morning break out session. Come and learn more about how to have those difficult conversations in order to support both the parent and caregiver relationship.

RESERVE YOUR SPOT

The Behavioral Health & Children and Family Services Conference

#Empower2025



October 20-23, 2025