THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Kinship Care Supports

Caregiver Wellness & Support · Build Your Support Circle

What relatives raising a child can ask about, from school enrollment to available assistance.

IN THIS GUIDE

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A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

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> *What relatives raising a child can ask about, from school enrollment to available assistance.*

THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and family friends raise a large share of the children whose parents are incarcerated. Most step in fast, without warning, and without the supports that come with a formal placement.

Because kinship caregivers are family, systems often assume they need nothing. Many receive no orientation, no benefits information, and no explanation of the paperwork that determines whether they can enroll a child in school or authorize a doctor's visit.

This lesson explains what kinship supports generally exist and how to find the version of them that applies where you live. Programs and rules differ by state and county, so the goal here is to make you an informed asker rather than to state what you qualify for.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE

Informal kinship care means the family arranged it themselves, without a court or child welfare agency involved. It is the most common arrangement and generally the one with the fewest automatic supports.

Formal kinship care means a court or agency placed the child with you. It usually comes with a caseworker and sometimes with payments and services, along with more oversight and requirements.

There are also arrangements in between, including legal guardianship obtained by the family without agency involvement. Which category you are in affects what supports and authority you have, so it is worth being able to say clearly which one describes your household.

CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT TO ASK ABOUT

Kinship navigator programs exist in many states specifically to help relative caregivers understand options and paperwork. They are the single best first call where they exist, because their whole function is orientation.

Benefits programs a household may be able to access include child-only cash assistance, food assistance, health coverage for the child, childcare assistance, and school-based supports such as free meals and

transportation protections for children in unstable housing situations. Eligibility rules vary and are decided by the agency, not by MFGP.

Legal documentation supports matter enormously: caregiver authorization forms, power of attorney, and guardianship are what let you act on the child's behalf at school and in a clinic. Court self-help centers and legal aid programs are the usual routes.

Practical and emotional supports include kinship support groups, respite care, and family resource centers. These often come from nonprofits rather than agencies.

+ HOW TO FIND YOUR VERSION

Call 211 and say the words "kinship care" — it is the standard term and it routes you faster than describing the situation. Ask specifically whether there is a kinship navigator program in your state.

Your state's child welfare or human services agency website typically has a kinship or relative caregiver page. Local Area Agencies on Aging often serve grandparent caregivers, including those raising children.

Schools can also connect you. Ask the school's family liaison or counselor what supports other relative caregivers in the district use. They frequently know local programs that never appear in a web search.

+ KEEP A PAPERWORK FILE

Every kinship caregiver ends up needing the same documents repeatedly: the child's birth certificate, Social Security number, immunization records, insurance information, school records, and whatever authorization document you hold.

Keep copies in one physical folder and one secure digital location. Being able to produce a document in five minutes rather than five days is what determines whether a school enrollment or a clinic visit happens this week.

+ ONE CALL THAT CHANGED THE PAPERWORK

A great-aunt raising a six-year-old had been unable to enroll him properly because she had no documentation of her authority, and the school kept asking for something she did not have a name for.

She called 211 and used the phrase kinship care. She was routed to a state kinship navigator program, which explained the caregiver authorization option in her state, told her which office issued it, and mentioned two supports she had not known existed — child-only assistance and a local relative caregiver group.

The enrollment was resolved in under two weeks. She said afterwards that she had spent four months trying to solve a problem she did not have the vocabulary to ask about.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Calling 211 about kinship care

"I'm a relative raising a child full-time. Is there a kinship navigator program or relative caregiver program in my state? I also need to know what documentation caregivers here use for school and medical decisions, and who I contact about it."

Asking a school about caregiver documentation

Say to the registrar, family liaison, or counselor.

"I'm the relative caring for this child day to day. Could you tell me exactly which document your district needs from me to enroll him and to be listed as the contact for school decisions? I'd like the name of the form so I can get the right one."

Asking about supports without over-explaining

Use with any agency or program intake.

"I'd rather not go through our family's private circumstances. What I can tell you is that I'm a relative caring for a child full-time, informally. Can you tell me what programs I should be asking about, and who decides eligibility?"

+ GET ORIENTED AS A KINSHIP CAREGIVER

- [ ] Decide which arrangement describes your household: informal, formal, or guardianship.
- [ ] Call 211 and ask by name for a kinship navigator or relative caregiver program.
- [ ] Find your state's kinship or relative caregiver page and note the agency name.
- [ ] Ask the school which caregiver document their district requires.
- [ ] Ask about child-only assistance, food assistance, and health coverage for the child.
- [ ] Ask about childcare assistance and any respite care available locally.
- [ ] Build one paperwork folder: birth certificate, SSN, immunizations, insurance, school records, authorization.
- [ ] Find one kinship support group, online or in person.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

Which kinship arrangement are we actually in?

Which document do I not yet have that keeps causing problems?

Which single agency or program will I call first?

What is missing from my paperwork folder today?

YOUR NEXT STEP

Search for a kinship navigator or family-support program in your county.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Written by My Fairy GodParents — reviewed August 2026.

This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.

For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.

You do not have to do this alone.

More free guides, scripts, and checklists:
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint