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Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption

Foster Wales Good Practice Guide for the Assessment and Support of

Connected Persons Foster Carers

Understanding Terminology: Connected Persons Foster Carers and Kinship Carers

All *Connected Persons Foster Carers* are kinship carers. 'Kinship carer' is a broad term that includes family members, friends, and others with a connection to the child who step in to care when the child cannot live with their parents.

Kinship care covers a range of legal arrangements—including children who are looked after under fostering regulations, those cared for under Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Orders, and informal family or private fostering arrangements.

It is important for Connected Persons Foster Carers to recognise themselves as kinship carers, particularly when seeking external support or resources. Using the term 'kinship care' in internet searches or when accessing services will help link carers with the appropriate national and third sector information and support.

For brevity, this guide will refer to connected persons foster carers as 'connected foster carers' or 'kinship foster carers'.



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Introduction

1

Assessing family members or close friends as kinship foster carers is a powerful opportunity to enhance a child's stability and belonging, however this can be a complex process which demands a skilled and thoughtful approach.



The first edition of this guide was produced in 2017 under the National Fostering Framework, which later became Foster Wales. Since then, Foster Wales has invested in updating and strengthening the guide to achieve better outcomes for everyone involved, reinforcing its commitment to supporting kinship foster care, the families it affects, and the practitioners working alongside them.

Potential kinship foster carers are often asked to engage in the assessment process at a time of grief or crisis within their family. Many had never considered taking on a parenting role for the children concerned and they may also have been unaware of the circumstances surrounding the local authority's intervention. Potential kinship foster carers can have limited time to understand the details of the role and process the implications of the journey ahead of them.

The assessment requires potential kinship foster carers to discuss their personal lives with practitioners with whom they may not yet have built a trusting relationship. They must be aware that their information will become subject to the scrutiny of panels, social workers, lawyers, and the courts. Understandably, the process can feel overwhelming for kinship families, who often describe feeling anxious and fearful.

Likewise, social workers must endeavour to conduct robust assessments in limited timeframes with families who may be wary of their intervention. They must support families in understanding the care system and potential options for a child's future, all while the family is experiencing the myriad of emotions that coincide with a time of crisis.

These complexities must be navigated with skill for it is only through the completion of full and robust kinship assessments that recommendations and decisions can be properly made in the child's best interests - at the foster panel, with the decision maker, and in the family court.

The relationships built with potential kinship carers lay the foundations for future stability for kinship families and must be based on mutual respect and honesty. Family members value being treated with empathy and, wherever possible, being supported to understand at an early stage the strengths, skills, resources, difficulties and risks that impact the care and safety of the children concerned.

This guide aims to support local authorities in developing a framework that enables their practitioners to support families through this process while also conducting thorough, sensitive, and strengths-based assessments. By recognising the unique dynamics of kinship care, we can empower families to provide safety, nurture, and love for children within their networks.

This is a guide to the assessment and support of connected persons foster carers; however, there is necessary reference to special guardianship as the two assessments are often undertaken concurrently or as a holistic kinship assessment, particularly when assessments occur during care proceedings or the pre-proceedings process.

The guide is not statutory guidance; its principles are based on case law, research, and findings from serious case/child practice reviews, alongside experiences and practice examples shared by practitioners and kinship families.





2

The Early Identification of Potential Kinship Carers

Key Points

Early identification of family members is essential:

- Many family members wish they had been involved sooner to support children and parents
- Provides additional time to undertake a thorough connected persons / kinship assessment
- Supports engagement by giving family members time to adjust to the new situation and what is
- being asked of them
- Promote a 'Think Kinship' mindset across all practitioners in contact with children
- Mapping kinship networks is a key intervention as soon as a child comes to the attention of children's services
- Create a focus on the identification of family members through well organised systemic approaches to work in the pre proceedings phase involving operational childcare teams, legal departments and kinship, fostering and SGO teams
- Family meetings are an effective way of involving family members in the care plan.

2.1 Promoting and Embedding a 'Think Kinship' Approach

The term 'kinship' taken in its broadest anthropological sense means: the network of relationships formed through biological and social ties, shaping cultural traditions, societal norms, and personal identity. It ranges from close family units to extended networks, forming the foundation of human social connection.

Think Kinship means being curious and attentive to the people who matter to the child now and who could become important in the future. It involves noticing who the child talks about, who they spend time with, and who provides care and stability when their parents cannot. It also means identifying who in the child's network offers support and security — and recognising where relationships may present challenges or risks.

Think Kinship should not be a narrow focus on specifically identifying a kinship carer but a broader exploration of locating the child within their kinship network.



Every practitioner in contact with children should be supported to embed **Think Kinship** in their approach to working with and supporting the children. The AFKA Cymru Think Kinship Tool or your local authority's equivalent can help practitioners to be alert to recognising a child's kinship network, these practitioners would include:

- those working in education, such as teachers, classroom assistants, mentors, playground supervisors;
- health practitioners including, GPs health visitors, school nurses, midwives, CAMHS, paediatricians;
- those providing services to specific age groups, such as nursery staff, youth workers;
- those delivering services to parents or carers with adult-orientated issues such as drug and alcohol, mental health learning disabilities and domestic violence;
- those in criminal justice settings such as police, probation and youth offending teams;
- community based practitioners;
- practitioners in housing and benefit services.

2.2 Engaging Family Members in the Task

Once children come to the attention of children's services mapping the child's kinship network and producing a detailed genogram, ecogram or family network map should be a key task.

> **"Supporting parents and families to take a broad lens is essential, if parents are the only people to identify potential carers then they may not consider the role that older siblings or a distant relative could play".**

This detailed picture of a child's network then forms the foundation for early identification of family members who may be able to care for the child if it is no longer possible, or safe, for the parents to do so.

The early involvement with family members, at the pre-proceedings stage of the PLO, the child protection / s47 enquiry phase, or even earlier, has the capacity for facilitating an easier relationship with them if the child's circumstances require an escalation into the pre proceedings protocol.

The **Code of Practice on the exercise of social services functions in relation to special guardianship orders** issued by Welsh Government in 2018 states:

> ***"Early intervention and identification of potential kinship carers will help ensure that local authorities have sufficient time to fully explore these issues and undertake quality assessments. Local authorities must, wherever possible, engage with families at an early stage, to agree what permanency options may be available, and ensure that families fully understand the need to nominate alternative carers within the family. Family meetings at this stage can help families begin to address the complexities of managing contact and the financial and practical support that might be needed. This can prevent delays later on when legal proceedings are instigated. Local authorities must ensure they have arrangements in place to facilitate family meetings at an appropriate stage."***

Several authorities across Wales require referral to their family group conference / meeting service at or prior to the initial child protection conference. Section 3 gives detailed guidance regarding family group conferences and family meetings.

Families consistently report that early involvement helps reduce the shock and allows them to feel part of the team supporting the child. It gives them time to process the often painful news that a child has suffered or is at risk of significant harm and helps them adjust and consider whether they, or other family members, can provide stable, permanent care.

Early identification of family members is essential to enabling local authorities to meet Public Law Outline (PLO) timescales while ensuring enough time for a thorough assessment.

In contrast, late identification during pre-proceedings or care proceedings can leave family members feeling rushed and confused, leading to defensiveness and hindering a full and fair assessment.

Good Practice: Early Identification

- Family Meeting at ICPC or before
- Raising the topic of potential kinship carers during PLO pre-proceedings process if not before
- If likely to be entering the PLO pre proceedings process, making an early referral to the kinship assessment team and/or a member of kinship assessment team attending legal gateway / legal planning /pre-proceedings meeting
- Judicious use of screening tools to support practice in identifying potential kinship carers who pose realistic options to care for the child

The public law working group issued: Best practice guidance: Support for and work with families prior to court proceedings in March 2021 Microsoft Word - Prior to court proceedings BPG report.docx)



The guide identified the following key theme in relation to wider family engagement and early identification of family and friends:

> **"safely managing risk, while building on family strengths and energising wider family support, is critical" (p.7)**

Also identifying wider family engagement as a core principle:

> ***"Partnership: work with the child(ren) and the family, including other significant adults, should be undertaken with the consent of the family, and their support network. This requires a collaborative approach to identifying issues together and co-producing a plan to support change" (p.11)***

The guidance requires that the legal gateway meeting / legal planning meeting identifies:

> ***"Family members who are to be consulted to offer either support or be assessed as alternative carers. The early sharing of necessary information with extended family and the use of a FGC (or similar model developed and used locally) is essential, unless there is good reason why this is impracticable" (p.16).***

And that the members of the legal gateway meeting / legal planning meeting should be informed with:

> ***"The names of the child(ren), their parents and any other significant family members or friends who may be able to offer support, in either the short or longer term (…)",***

Some local authorities in Wales ensure that a member of their kinship/connected person assessment team attends legal gateway / legal planning meeting or pre-proceedings meeting to support with early identification of family members and ensure a timely initiation of assessment work.

Good Practice Considerations:

- Taking time at the outset to explain why an assessment is required and what it involves.
- Using plain language, avoiding acronyms, and checking for understanding.
- Understanding anxiety or confusion and validating the emotional impact of assessment.
- Build confidence and understanding through providing preparation training and written information supported by verbal explanations: see section 9.1 for what to include.
- Acknowledging and respecting the carer's existing relationship with the child and wider family.
- Embedding an understanding of the unique nature of kinship care throughout children's services.

2.3 Explaining Assessment and Social Work Intervention to Families

> **"I'm not a carer, I'm his grandmother …I've bought up a whole family without being assessed".**

Connected persons foster carers can find the assessment process confusing, intrusive, or even insulting—particularly when they feel their family role and past caregiving experience is being discounted. A lack of clarity about why assessment is needed can foster defensiveness, fear, and resistance, undermining the potential for a collaborative relationship.

Establishing a shared understanding early on is essential. If a prospective carer doesn't understand the reasons for the assessment, or feels tested and judged rather than supported and informed, the process can become distressing and adversarial. The foundation for a good assessment lies in building trust through open explanation and respectful dialogue.

> **"Once I understood it wasn't a test, I could actually talk to them properly. Before that, I just felt watched."**

Some family members will have experience of social services or the family courts; others will have none. Assumptions should not be made about people's understanding of the system or terminology. Language matters—terms like assessment, permanence, engagement, or even short-term and long-term may carry very different meanings for families than they do for professionals.

Clear, jargon-free communication must be a priority from the earliest stages of involvement, with consistent attention paid to clarifying meaning throughout the process. Cultural and social differences should be actively considered when explaining systems, roles, and expectations.

Carers would benefit from a flow-chart visually detailing the various assessment stages and where these fit into social work and family court intervention.

As the first point of contact for many potential kinship carers is often a front-line worker, fostering services should support collaboration between front-line and specialist kinship teams to ensure robust understanding of kinship care.

2.4 Explaining Multi-Track Planning to Families

This is a pivotal point for families that can increase anxiety and fear. It is not to say that this can be avoided in its entirety, knowing that other care pathways are being considered is a frightening prospect.

> **"If I don't do this or can't do this I'll lose my niece, she will be sent for adoption, I have never felt so afraid of making a mistake."**

However, it is important to acknowledge and empathise with families, to make space for these feelings and maintain awareness of how fears can impact a person's willingness to disclose vulnerabilities and support needs. Potential kinship carers should be offered avenues of support: see section 9.

Preparation training which includes these aspects alongside explanations of family intervention, care proceedings and the assessment process can be a useful tool in supporting families at the early identification stage: See section 9.1.

Families should expect to be given clear explanations of how and when decisions will be made and it can be helpful to explain multi-track planning to families using the analogy of a plan A, plan B, plan C and so forth.

2.5 Formally Identifying Potential Kinship Carers

When a member of a child's kinship network expresses interest or is suggested as a potential carer for a child, this should be promptly recorded on the child's file.

The potential kinship carer should receive written confirmation of:

- The date they self-identified or were proposed as a potential kinship carer
- If and when the assessment process will begin, including explaining the difference between viability and full assessment.
- Contact details for relevant teams and practitioners

If a potential kinship carer states that they do not wish, or no longer wish to be considered as an option to care for the child:

- Their reasons should be clearly recorded and confirmed with them to avoid any misunderstandings or incorrect assumptions.
- They should receive a clear explanation of the timeframes the local authority and or family court is working within and the implications of their decision should they wish to be re-considered at any point in the future.
- Any support they can give to the child and any carer of the child, now or potentially in the future should be fully explored and clearly recorded on the child's file.



2.6 Considering Suitability Early in the Process: Screening Tools

In some cases, it may become clear early on that a potential kinship carer is either unable to take on full-time care of the child or may not be in a position to meet the requirements of the assessment process.

To support fair and transparent decision-making, some local authorities in Wales use screening tools to help identify any significant concerns that might prevent a carer from progressing to either a viability assessment or a full assessment. These tools outline what the assessment involves, helping potential kinship carers understand the level of commitment required for the process.

Local authority practitioners have access to practice forums where they can share examples of these tools and discuss how they can be used to support good practice (see support section 10.1). However, it is essential that screening tools are used with care, ensuring that potential kinship carers fully understand the language used and implications of withdrawing prior to a viability assessment.

Practitioners must also be mindful that, during care proceedings, the court can consider a range of permanence options, including a Care Order, Special Guardianship Order (SGO), Child Arrangements Order (CAO), or Placement Order. Any early-stage decision-making should take a broad view of how a kinship carer might support the child, both now and in the future, rather than focusing solely on the fostering role.

The outcome of any initial discussions or screening should be communicated clearly to potential kinship carers, and their ability to offer support in any capacity should be explored and recorded on the child's file.

This form of initial filtering or screening assessment should only be used to rule out a potential kinship carer from progressing through to viability and or full assessment in cases where there is strong, clear evidence that a kinship carer is not a realistic option to care for the child. If there is any uncertainty, a viability assessment should be undertaken to ensure that all possibilities are fully considered.

If care proceedings are ongoing, it is ultimately for the court to decide whether a potential kinship carer should be ruled out at this stage. However, where there are grave concerns about suitability, practitioners should provide clear and well-evidenced reasoning to demonstrate why an individual is not a 'realistic option' for the child's care.

2.7 Overcoming Barriers: Confidentiality and Readiness

A key barrier to early engagement is uncertainty about whether contacting and involving family members in planning or assessments might breach birth parents' confidentiality.

Best practice and data protection principles require seeking and obtaining consent from birth parents when working with them. However, if consent is withheld, it may still be in the child's best interests to approach family members. During care proceedings, a judge can issue a direction to allow this, but this option is not usually available during pre-proceedings.

Local authority practice varies. Some authorities view contacting family members without parental consent as unlawful, while others consider the information to belong to the child rather than the parent and have contacted potential kinship carers on that basis. Practitioners should understand the legal framework and seek legal advice before contacting family members without parental consent.

Engaging with a child's wider family network during pre-proceedings can be challenging. Some parents may struggle to share information with family members or present an honest picture of the concerns, perhaps due to complex family dynamics, or difficult feelings such as fear, anger, guilt, or shame.

Additionally, some family members may be focused on supporting the parent to retain care of the child, making it difficult for them to consider becoming a carer. For others, the idea of stepping in as a carer may feel premature or overwhelming while the situation remains uncertain.

It is essential that practitioners remain sensitive to these barriers, approach families with care, and ensure that decisions about contacting family members are grounded in the child's best interests and informed by legal guidance.



2.8 Pre- birth

The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory published: Born into Care: Best practice guidelines and other resources - Nuffield Family Justice Observatory in March 2023.

Within these guidelines **'wider family and friend inclusive practice'** is highlighted as one of thirteen overarching principles.

Detailed guidance is given regarding the early identification of family members during pre-birth, the use of family meetings (family group conferences) alongside policy, practice and legal considerations for working with potential and identified kinship carers.

This guidance includes ensuring that potential kinship carers understand how to engage with the legal process, addresses confidentiality issues and gives direction on preparing kinship carers to support in the pre-birth and maternity settings.



https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/nfjo_newborn-babies_best_practice_guidelines_english_20230330-2.pdf

Family Group Conferences and Family Meetings

3

This section has been written by Y Bont | Helping children, young people and families who co-ordinate the All Wales Family Group Conference Network

Family Group Conference is a family-led meeting in which the child's family and friends network come together to make a plan for a child.

The process is supported by an independent coordinator who helps the family prepare for the Family Group Conference and chairs the meeting. Children are usually involved in their own Family Group Conference, often with support from an advocate. It is a voluntary process, and families cannot be forced into one.

Most families in Wales come to have a Family Group Conference because of safeguarding or child protection concerns, often as a recommendation from a Child Protection Case Conference or as part of the Public Law Outline process.

Family Group Conferences are also used in Wales for a variety of other reasons and in different situations e.g. Early Intervention and Prevention, Families First Teams, Youth Justice, Education, Parents leaving prison and re unification plans.

Why Use Family Group Conferences when making decisions for children?

Family Group Conferences provide family members and a child's network with an opportunity to be informed and involved in plans and decisions being made for a child or children. The process ensures that family members are fully recognised as decision makers, in order that they can fully participate in key decisions. (Mary Mitchell 2019).

The Family Group Conference will also give the social worker(s) involved an opportunity to share safeguarding concerns with the child/children's network.

There is a wealth of research that demonstrates positive outcomes for children and their families because of taking part in a Family Group Conference. Family Group Conferences have been found to improve outcomes through several mechanisms. These include quicker processes, clearer information, more even power-sharing and greater trust between families and professionals (Foundations 2023).

Family Group Conferences aim to improve decision-making rather than achieve specific outcomes. However, families who are informed about the child or children's needs may decide as part of their family plan to offer care and or support that can be incorporated into Child Protection or Public Law Outline planning.

The 2018 Care Crisis Review 'Goals for Change' highlights the need for family engagement at an early stage. Family Group Conferences are identified in the Review as a first step in working with families.

Engaging family members at an early stage such during initial child protection enquiries facilitates engagement with close and wider family and promotes the empowerment that can be achieved using the Family Group Conference model.

Research shows that family members have been consistent in expressing a view that the earlier they can be involved the better, however Family Group Conferences can only take place with the consent of someone with Parental Responsibility, so while it is recommended that Social Services make an offer of a Family Group Conference at an early stage, parents may not be ready yet to accept the need for wider family involvement.

There is learning from research that when services accept the parents' initial reluctance to participate in a Family Group Conference that there is a higher likelihood that they will positively engage at a later stage.

Holding a Family Group Conference within early stages within the Public Law Outline process, may facilitate family members promoting their best options within the family to put forward to provide alternative care for children, thus avoiding the need for children to be placed with general foster carers.



Good Practice

A Family Group Conference is a recognised model in involving families in decision making. Family Group Conferences should follow the seven UK agreed standards (Family Rights Group):

1) The Family Group Conference co-ordinator is Independent. This means that the co-ordinator should not be involved in any other way with the family, especially decision-making responsibilities.

2) The family's decision to take part is voluntary. The Family Group Conference will only go ahead if key family members' consent.

3) The Family Group Conference is family Led and includes private family time for the family to make their plan.

4) The child referred is the focus of the process and if appropriate will be supported to take part.

5) The family will have all the necessary resources to make safe plans. This includes a safe and neutral venue to hold the Family Group Conference and all the relevant information they need to make a plan.

6) The Family Group Conference Service will respect a family's right to privacy and confidentiality (Safeguarding responsibilities apply).

7) The Family Group Conference service will work to principles of equality and inclusivity. Families' cultural needs will be respected.

Family Group Conference services should be delivered consistently and to high standards, including using independent facilitators and providing families with private time during the meeting (Foundations 2023)

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What does a Family Group Conference look like?

While most of the Local Authorities report that they offer some kind of Family Meeting process, not all local authorities yet in Wales offer the Family Group Conference model. It is important to note that the research which provides the evidence of successful outcomes for children is based on research into the nationally recognised Family Group Conference Model and not any other form of Family Meetings which do not uphold the seven agreed standards.

In Wales Local Authorities have made their own arrangements in how they provide a service:

- Service Level Agreements with third sector providers.
- Third sector and Local Authority partnerships.
- In House standalone services.
- In House with add on to other teams.
- Private providers.

Whatever the commissioning arrangements the Local Authorities have in place to provide Family Group Conferences the process should follow like this:

1) A referral is made to a Family Group Conference service.
2) The referral is allocated to an independent co-ordinator
3) The Co-ordinator meets with key family members
4) The Co-ordinator meets with extended family and network
5) The Co-ordinator prepares family and professionals for a Family Group Conference.
6) The Co-ordinator facilitates the Family Group Conference which is in 3 parts:
i) Information Sharing between professionals and family members
ii) Private Family Time
iii) Family share their plans and decisions with professionals. The plan will then be presented to the relevant statutory processes for endorsement. This could be Core Group, Case Conference, Looked after Children's reviews and or Court Proceedings.
7) The Co-ordinator types and sends the plan out to all involved.
8) A review is offered.

Identifying Family Member to Provide Alternative Care for Children.

Section 2 evidences the requirements and importance of identifying potential kinship carers early in the process.

When it becomes apparent that a child may need alternative care a Family Group Conference can be arranged to: -

- Share information with the family about the child's needs.
- Raise awareness of the seriousness of the situation.
- Provide information regarding the Connected Cares terms and conditions,
- Share information about the expectations around connected carers assessment.
- Allow the family to identify members to put themselves forwards as potential alternative carers.
- Identify support available to members of the family who become connected carers.

Best practice within these situations is that consent is sought from the family to invite a staff member from the Fostering/ Connected Persons / Kinship service to attend part one of the Family Group Conference to share information with the family so that any decision made is an informed decision which avoids delay.



The Temporary Approval of a Connected Person

4

When deciding where a looked after child should live, the local authority's primary duty under section 78 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 is to safeguard and promote the child's well-being. Placement options are outlined in section 81 of the Act.

Where possible, the child should be placed with a parent, someone with parental responsibility, or a person with an existing child arrangements or residence order. However, this is not always possible or appropriate.

In such cases, the local authority should give priority to placing the child with a relative, friend, or other connected person—someone already known to and trusted by the child—so they can remain within their family or community network.

If the child is subject to a care order or interim care order, the connected person must be approved as a local authority foster carer. However the local authority may make a temporary approval for the connected person provided it is satisfied that:

- doing so would be the most suitable means to safeguard and promote the child's welfare
- it is necessary to place the child with the connected person before their assessment is completed

Temporary approval occurs under regulation 26 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 (CPPCR(W)R 2015) and before granting a temporary approval, the local authority must satisfy the requirements of these regulations, as discussed in 4.1.

Once temporary approval is granted the connected person **must** sign a written agreement agreeing to the items in reg 26 (2)(f) of the CPPCR(W)R 2015 and the local authority **must** make immediate arrangements for the suitability of the connected person to be a local authority foster carer to be assessed in accordance with the Fostering Regulations.

Temporary approval can be given for a period not exceeding 16 weeks which can be extended for a further 8 weeks if necessary once satisfying the requirements of reg 27 of the CPPCR(W)R 2015.

> ***"Temporary approval naturally carries risks, including the risk that the relative, friend or connected person will not be approved as a local authority foster carer at the end of the process, resulting in further disruption in the child's life. It is clearly preferable that, wherever possible, the full assessment and approval process is completed before a placement is made"*** **(para 163. Part 6 Code of Practice).**



4.1 Regulations 26 & 27 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015

Schedule 5 of the regulations sets out the matters that must be taken into consideration when assessing the suitability of a 'connected person', under regulation 26, to care for a child. Paragraphs 150 to 165 of the part-6-code-of-practice-looked-after-and-accommodated-children.pdf. provide further guidance.

In some cases, the local authority may already know the connected person through pre-proceedings work or family group meetings. However, many placements are made in emergencies, where a child needs immediate care and the alternative would be a placement with unfamiliar foster carers.

Social worker's undertaking suitability assessments for temporary approval would benefit from having a clear understanding of connected persons fostering and awareness that a full fostering assessment will begin immediately: they should be able to communicate this requirement and all it entails with clarity and confidence to the connected person.

It would be good practice to view decisions to grant temporary approval through a permanency planning lens, in consultation with social workers experienced in connected person foster care and kinship care more broadly.





Good Practice:
Making Emergency Placement Decisions Under Regulation 26

Schedule 5 provides a long list for consideration. The following four domains capture the principal strands of Schedule 5 and set out the most important matters for consideration when this section is being used as a matter of urgency.

1. **The quality of the existing relationship with the child**

- How well does this person know the child?
- Is the child familiar with the home and other members of the household?
- What are the child's wishes and feelings about being cared for by this person and living in the home?

2. **The ability to protect the child from harm**

Assess the connected person's ability to:

- Understand what the child has experienced and respond protectively.
- Prioritise the child's safety, especially if there are risks within the family network (e.g., contact with unsafe adults).
- Work with professionals and comply with agreed restrictions, including family time/contact arrangements.
- Provide safe, suitable accommodation and meet the child's emotional, physical, health and educational needs.
- Reflect on and disclose relevant background factors for themselves and other household members—such as health conditions, experiences of domestic abuse, mental ill health, substance misuse, or a learning disability—ensuring these do not pose an immediate risk.

Additional checks should include:

- PNC checks.
- Evaluation of the living environment and proximity to known risks.
- Willingness to work with professionals and engage with the full fostering assessment.

3. **The practicalities of the proposed placement**

- Is the connected person available and practically able to meet the child's needs (e.g., school runs, appointments, medication/health care needs)?
- Are there adequate sleeping arrangements?
- Can they support family time/contact with siblings, friends or other family members?
- Do they understand their responsibilities under the temporary fostering agreement?
- Can they explain, in a child-centred way, using information provided to them by the LA why the child is staying with them?
- Identification of support needs to mitigate any identified risks and how those support needs will be met.

4. **Paperwork to be provided / signed**

- Temporary fostering agreement - this should set out the legal status of the placement with them, delegated authority, medical consent and all other CLA considerations including supervisory visits and visits from the child's social worker alongside the requirements of Reg 26(2)(f) of the CPPCR(W)R 2015.
- Written script detailing how the carer can explain to the child why they are living with them
- LA written information explaining the nature of a connected persons assessment (practice examples of written information are shared in practitioner forums see section 10)
- Carers would find a flow-chart explaining where temp approval fits into the process helpful
- Agreed next steps including contact details for all relevant teams and practitioners

4.2 Support for Temporarily Approved Foster Carers

Gaining temporary approval can be an overwhelming experience for kinship carers. It may also lead to understandable expectations that, having been entrusted with the child's care, a positive outcome to the full assessment is assured.

Sensitive, relationship-based practice is essential at this stage. Carers need clear and compassionate communication to help them understand: while they are currently providing the most appropriate care to safeguard and promote the child's welfare the assessment and/or court process will still need to consider all aspects of long-term planning. Please refer to sections 2.3 and 2.4 for further guidance on how to approach these conversations.

The Part 6 Code of Practice states:

> ***"165. The visiting requirements, where a looked after child has been placed with a relative, friend or connected person subject to temporary approval, will be more frequent than where the approval process has been completed. These visits will enable the social worker to assess the quality of the child's experience in the placement, and how the relationship with the carer and other members of the household is developing.***
>
> ***The social worker will also be able to identify any additional support or services which may be provided, to ensure the placement continues to meet the child's needs. Where there are concerns that, despite the provision of appropriate support, the placement is no longer the most suitable way of meeting the child's needs, the local authority may need to terminate the placement before the completion of the approval process."***

Some Welsh local authorities offer temporarily approved foster carers access to **peer support groups and training.** These opportunities have been found to help carers better understand the fostering role and assessment process, while also providing valuable emotional support.

4.3 The Court's Use of s38(6) Children Act 1989

S38(6) is the mechanism by which the court may order an assessment of the child during the course of care proceedings.

A s38(6) direction may only be made when there is an interim care order or care order. It is theoretically limited to a 'medical or psychiatric examination or other assessment of the child'. However, case law has held that a judge has the power to use s38(6) to insist that a LA places a child in a specific placement (Re A [2009] EWHC 865). The court can use s38(6) to overrule the local authority and effectively insist upon an interim placement, provided that it can show that the 'primary purpose' of the placement is an assessment.

The court may use s38(6), therefore, to override the local authority if it refuses to place a child with a specific placement under regulation 26 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015.

When s38(6) direction is made the court directs that the placement takes place and subsequently takes responsibility, rather than the local authority taking responsibility. However, during the placement an assessment should take place in the same way as if the child was placed under regulation 26.

Although the court may order a s38(6) direction, local authorities should avoid seeking such a direction themselves. It is preferable to remain within the more secure framework created by regulations 26 and 27, where the allocation of parental responsibility is clear.

Viability Assessments of Potential Kinship Carers

5

> ***"In most local authorities, some form of initial family and friends care assessment is used to determine which members of a child's family and friends network are a potentially realistic option to care for that child and should therefore be subject to a full assessment as a potential carer ... These are commonly called 'viability assessments"*** ***(Initial-FF-assessment-guide-2022.pdf)***

5.1 The Purpose of Viability Assessments

Case law (Re R (A Child) [2014] EWCA Civ 1625) has held that, in completing its welfare analysis at the end of care proceedings, the local authority does not have to take every single possible assessment and show its 'workings out' at the final hearing.

In Re R the Court of Appeal held:

'The (PLO) process of identifying options which can be discarded at an early stage in the proceedings itself demands an appropriate degree of rigour … but re B-S does not require that every stone has to be uncovered and the ground exhaustively examined … nor is there any basis for assuming that more than one negative assessment is required before a potential carer can be eliminated.'

We know, therefore, that in identifying options there has to be 'rigour', but having identified an option as being unrealistic through a rigorous process, then there should be no need to complete a full assessment.

This initial assessment is not to determine whether an individual is 'viable' but whether they can provide a potentially 'viable' placement for a specific child and recommend to the court which members of the child's family and kinship network should be further assessed as potential carers for the child.

Although it is ultimately for the court to decide which options should proceed to full assessment during care proceedings, a well-evidenced and thoughtfully written viability assessment is a valuable tool in identifying whether a potential carer is a realistic option for the child.

Where the assessment supports progression, it enables timely support and planning. Where it identifies significant concerns, it can help avoid unnecessary delay, reduce the emotional toll on the person offering to care, and prevent avoidable resource demands on the local authority and the court.

During care proceedings, the court can consider a range of permanence options, including a Care Order, Special Guardianship Order (SGO), Child Arrangements Order (CAO), or if the plan for adoption is accepted by the court, a Placement Order. Viability assessments should take a broad view of how a kinship carer might provide for the child's needs, both now and in the future, rather than focusing solely on the fostering role.



Large Numbers of Family Members

Where there are large numbers of family members who wish to be considered to care for the child in question the local authority may choose to take steps to determine who would be the most realistic options to put forward to the court for viability assessments and thus avoid unnecessary multiple full assessments.

This may include some form of initial screening (see section 2.6) or take place within a family group conference / meeting (see section 3) where family members can be engaged in decision making regarding who are the most realistic options for the child and who may prefer to be in a supporting role.

However local authorities should be mindful that the Public Law Working Group Best Practice Guidance states the following with regards to viability assessments:

> ***"This can be a complex process in itself if there are a large number of family members, family members who live in other local authorities or other countries in the UK or abroad. It is important to ensure that the realistic options for the child are fairly evaluated, and that a cap is not placed on the number of potential carers by way of case management directions. The parties should nevertheless be clear that the emphasis is on realistic options and proposals for assessment will be evaluated on that basis".***
> ***https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Special-guardianship-BPG-report_Clickable.pdf***

For guidance viability assessment for family members residing overseas see section 6.

5.2 When to Undertake a Viability Assessment?

There are differing views about the most appropriate point at which to undertake viability assessments. What follows is a balanced overview to support legal departments and social work teams decide on an approach that reflects the needs of the child, the working context of practitioners and effective family engagement in pre-proceedings.

The **Public Law Working Group (PLWG) Report on Special Guardianship (2020)** Microsoft Word - Special guardianship BPG report.docx supports early engagement with families in pre-proceedings. It provides a framework (see pages 11-12) for identifying realistic options at this stage, although it locates viability or initial assessments as taking place once the local authority has made the decision to issue proceedings.

Since the above guidance was produced there has been a 'relaunch' of the Public Law Outline, necessitating that local authorities consider how best to utilise the pre-proceedings phase to reduce delay later in the process. Where possible some local authorities choose to complete viability assessments during the pre-proceedings stage, an approach highlighted by **CoramBAAF (2023)** Public Law Outline 010223.pdf.

The **Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment: A good practice guide (2022)** Initial-FF-assessment-guide-2022.pdf page 12, recognises the importance of identifying and engaging family members early specifically in contributing to decision-making in pre-proceedings planning, but not necessarily undertaking viability assessments at this stage.

Striking a Balance

There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each case should be considered on its individual merits. The child's needs, the urgency of the situation, the stage of the local authority's decision-making, and the availability of information will all influence the timing of viability assessments. The priority should always be to avoid unnecessary delay, while ensuring that any assessment undertaken is fair, proportionate, and grounded in sound engagement with family members.

5.3 How long should a viability assessment take?

It is recommended that viability assessments are undertaken in 2 – 4 weeks. This is in line with current policy and practice in Wales.

5.4 Who should undertake viability assessments?

Kinship assessments require specialist knowledge, cultural competence, and emotional intelligence. Workers with limited experience in this area should be provided with robust supervision, support and training to ensure assessments are delivered fairly and with insight.

It is good practice to involve both the child's social worker and a social worker from the team which undertakes connected persons assessments.

This is to:

- Combine their knowledge of the family in order to gain a different perspective and insight in the family situation.
- Ensure that the family are not placed in the position of having to give information that is already known to the department.
- Bring an additional element of expertise in assessment which the child's social worker may not have, i.e. the assessment of suitability of kinship carers/ knowledge of the Fostering Panels (Establishment and Function) (Wales) Regulations 2018.
- Introduce an element of independence for the family.
- Provide an analysis which focuses on the child's needs and whether these family members appear to be able to meet those needs sufficiently to proceed to a full assessment.

Where there are two assessors involved, clear lines of accountability need to be developed to ensure that there is no overlap of work and potential carers do not have to go over the same ground twice (unless that is deemed necessary). Time should therefore be taken to plan the work if it spans the two teams, ensuring that there is good communication and that joint reviews are integrated into the work.

5.5 How to approach a viability assessment

It is important for practitioners, when embarking upon a viability assessment, to bear in mind:

- There should be an acknowledgement of the shock and distress a family may be experiencing.
- The assessment should be conducted in a spirit of collaboration, empathy, and transparency in exploring whether these family members may be able to care for the child/ren concerned.

This is the start of an educative, two-way process. Information and explanations should be given about:

- The nature of this assessment and how it relates to future assessment work and any court process, explaining that this is a complex process and which may necessitate re-visiting information at a later stage.
- The differences between fostering, special guardianship and child arrangements orders to enable the family to begin the process of making informed decisions about the options.

5.6 What should viability assessments contain?

Across Wales local authorities have developed their own formats for viability assessments, some of which are approved by the relevant local family justice board.

The Family Rights Group, in partnership with an expert working group has produced a guide for viability assessments, 'Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment: A Good Practice Guide, 2022 *Initial-FF-assessment-guide-2022.pdf. The domains covered in the guide do not differ greatly from the domains covered in the Welsh formats, but it provides useful guidance on individual areas, particularly for those practitioners inexperienced in undertaking viability assessments.

Each family setting and child are unique so any guidance can never be exhaustive. Practitioners will have to use their skills in assessment to identify whether there are other areas which may be relevant to each individual assessment.

As is always the case in social work, the gathering of information alone is not sufficient for an assessment; it is the analysis of this information in the context of the applicant's' wish to be considered as prospective carers for the specific child/ ren that is critical.

Criminal Record and Suitability Checks

The safety of the child is paramount. During a viability assessment, it is good practice to ask the proposed carer about any past cautions or convictions and, with consent, seek confirmation via a Police National Computer (PNC) check. Where offences are recorded, the assessor should explore their nature, timing and context to assess relevance to the carer's current suitability.

Checks should also be discussed with other adult household members, as all adults will need to be considered in terms of potential risk. Where the assessment indicates that a full connected persons fostering assessment is appropriate, enhanced DBS checks will be required for all household members over 18 and others significantly involved in the child's care.

Assessors and managers should be aware that if any statutory checks or references beyond a PNC are sought at this stage, this may constitute the start of Stage 1 of a fostering assessment.

In some cases, offences that would prevent someone becoming a mainstream foster carer may not necessarily rule out a kinship carer, depending on the legal framework and a robust risk assessment of the individual circumstances.



Good Practice: matters to be covered in viability assessments

- Reason for proposed placement, and motivation to care for the child
- How well do child and potential carer(s) know each other / quality of relationship
- Understanding of the child's needs and wider family dynamics
- Accommodation, including proposed sleeping arrangements for the child
- Age and health of potential carer
- Lifestyle of carer and household members including smoking
- Employment status of carer and short and long term financial implications
- Any history of domestic violence, substance use / alcohol dependency
- Consensus on part of all family / household members to engage with the full assessment process / care for the child(ren) including necessary checks and references
- Prospective carer's experience of caring for children. Any local authority concerns about this
- Potential carers' understanding of what is being asked (in terms of permanency and protection)
- Analysis of family dynamics, insight of family members into possible problems, family members' support of the idea of reunification
- Potential legal options and impact of placement upon potential carer and family / household
- Working relationship with LA and other agencies and ability to engage with the LA's care plan and to keep information confidential
- Compatibility of child(ren) with any pets in the potential placement
- Critical analysis of strengths and risks/vulnerabilities

5.7 Viability Assessments and the Social Worker's Evidence Template

The most recent version of the Social Workers Evidence Template, Ministry of Justice, February 2016, usefully outlines areas to be considered in a viability assessment. Although it has not been formally adopted by some Welsh local authorities, it provides useful guidance:

Section 6: Analysis of the evidence of wider family and friends capability

6.1 Analysis of the evidence of wider family and friends capability to meet each child's needs, including analysis of the evidence of any capability gap and whether/how this can be bridged in the child's timescale.

Key considerations for a viability assessment:

1. *The genogram and ecomap should routinely identify those relatives who are already protective contacts for the child. Both the genogram and the ecomap should be comprehensive and inclusive.*
2. *Risky contacts should be excluded from consideration through a robust filtering process.* **This prima facie viability – for being a permanent carer – should be extended by three further tests – before a full assessment is carried out.**
3. *The three additional viability tests are:*
   a) That the carer understands in broad terms the needs of the child subject to proceedings
   b) That the carer understands the level and type of care the child will need throughout their childhood as a consequence of their experiences
   c) That the carer expresses an authentic willingness to be part of the team around the child until matters are fully resolved.

5.8 The Analysis of Viability Assessments

The following domains are considered as being the most important to consider within the final analysis at the end of the viability assessment process:

1. The benefits to the child if placed with the potential carer in the context of their pre-existing relationship, wishes and feelings and/or belonging, culture and identity.
2. Any risk posed to the child if placed with the potential carers, both in respect of the carer's capacity to protect the child from any harm posed by unsafe adults and the ability of the potential carers to meet the child's needs
3. An ability to work with the local authority to deliver the care plan for the child
4. An ability to start to see the child's needs separately from the needs of the parents
5. Can any gap in capacity be addressed by the provision of training and/or support, within the timeframe for the child?



5.9 Outcome / next steps

Sharing and Finalising the Report

Wherever possible the potential carer should be given the opportunity to review a draft of the assessment report. They should be invited to highlight any factual inaccuracies and offer comments. Once finalised, a copy of the completed report should be shared with them.

Withdrawing from the Assessment

There may be times when a potential kinship carer decides not to proceed with the assessment, either during or after the process. In these instances, it is helpful practice to request written confirmation of their decision to withdraw.

Supporting Family Dynamics

The dynamics within families can be complex. Some individuals may need support from social workers to explain to relatives—particularly the child's parents—that they are unable to take on the caring role. In other cases, support may be needed to help potential carers navigate or overcome resistance from within the wider family to them stepping forward.

Scope of Viability Assessments

While a viability assessment may appear limited in depth when compared to a full fostering or Special Guardianship assessment, its purpose is to provide an initial view. It is a preliminary tool to determine whether a further, more detailed assessment is warranted. Where the outcome supports ongoing consideration, the report should highlight any key areas that require further exploration at the next stage.





6 Overseas Assessments of Potential Kinship Carers

Children and Families Across Borders **(CFAB)** is a UK-wide charity that provides critical support to local authorities and other agencies with cross-border children and family cases.

CFAB acts as the Central Authority for Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government. This involves managing casework under the 1996 Hague Convention and providing support and guidance to Welsh unitary authorities to explore international placements.

Created in collaboration with CFAB's Cross-Border Child Safeguarding Working Group, the International Kinship Care Guide is a good practice guide for professionals placing children from local authority care with family members abroad. This guide includes detailed guidance on both viability and full assessments.

The charity's website also offers guides for professionals including placing children with family overseas, international child protection, UK social workers practising overseas and families fleeing overseas.

CFAB runs a free national Advice Line 020 7735 8941, open Monday to Friday from 10:00 to 15:30. Cases can also be referred via email to:

- info@cfab.org.uk.
- Welsh Central Authority: welshca@cfab.org.uk

CFAB
protecting CHILDREN and uniting FAMILIES ACROSS BORDERS

The guidance accompanying CoramBAAF's Kinship Care Assessment Framework (Form K) for use in Wales, to be published soon, gives detailed information regarding overseas assessment in the Welsh context.

CoramBAAF local authority members may contact the Outbound Permanence Service, particularly when writing the support plan.



Full Assessments of Prospective Connected Persons Foster Carers

7

In Wales a Connected Persons Assessment, also sometimes called a Unified Assessment can mean a single focus on fostering, particularly when undertaken as a result of a CPPCR(W)R 2015 Reg 26 placement (see section 4).

However, connected persons assessments can also be undertaken with options of becoming a special guardian or a foster carer, or other legal arrangements considered concurrently - this is often the case when there are current care proceedings and where the primary focus is on determining whether the arrangement is in the child's best interests with the legal status as a secondary consideration.

In England these assessments are more commonly referred to as kinship assessments and their statutory guidance states:

> ***"In order for the placement to be in the child's best interests, the carer will need to have the capacity to meet their needs for the duration of the proposed placement, whether this is short or long term. The assessment should take into account the likely length of the placement, the age of the child and, if appropriate (as may be the case where the carers are older), the capacity of the wider family to contribute to the child's long term care."***



Joan Hunt, in the **Practice Tool: Assessing and supporting family and friends care** (Research in Practice, 2015, updated 2020) states that kinship assessments are complex and in-depth requiring substantial, specialist expertise to address potential challenges including:

- Establishing trust and rapport with carers who may have negative views of social workers, or who are defensive and fear losing the child.
- Working with carers who may understand the need for assessment, but not for such extensive investigation.
- Assessing the capacity to protect of carers who may not have been fully aware of the extent of the family's problems, and who need time and help to come to terms with what has happened and to deal with their own feelings of guilt, shame, anger and loss.
- Assessing complex dynamics across the whole family system.
- Helping carers achieve a realistic understanding of the potential challenges and impact on their lives.
- Identifying both immediate and longer-term support needs.
- Producing a robust assessment within a short (and, in care proceedings, sometimes truncated) timescale, or where the arrangement has not been tested for a substantial period.
- Evidencing conclusions in the context of what may be uncertain, shifting and contested thresholds within the local authority and court systems.

Robust pre-assessment / pre-proceedings work as advocated in section 2, with adequate support as advocated in section 9.1 can serve to overcome some of these challenges and provide the basis for assessments rooted in child-focused, collaborative, and transparent approaches.

Every effort should be made to strive for a high-quality assessment which considers not just the information gathered and analysed but also the potential kinship carer's experience of the process.

A high-quality assessment should:

- Be child-focused, undertaken in the spirit of collaboration.
- Prioritise laying the foundations for future working relationships through treating carers with respect and sensitivity, valuing their unique insights and knowledge and develop trust through honest and transparent social work practice.
- Provide an evidenced based analysis of the potential carer's strengths, vulnerabilities, and any potential risks associated with the arrangement.
- Determine whether the carer could meet the child's current and likely future needs in the context of support, identifying and articulating the support needs of both child and carer, with a clear plan of how these support needs would be met.
- Inform, educate and prepare the carers for the responsibilities and challenges ahead, both immediately and in the longer term.
- Ensure carers understand permanence, legal options, and what commitment through to age 18 and beyond entails.
- Explore and develop viable plans for ongoing contact with parents, siblings, and extended family.
- Ensure carers have the opportunity to make informed decisions, including stepping back if necessary, through providing sufficient preparation training and support.

Adapted from: **Practice Tool: Assessing and supporting family and friends care** (Joan Hunt, Research in Practice, 2015, updated 2020)

"Excellent knowledge and understanding of the foster carer arising from robust assessment with a focus on future placement stability is crucial to maintaining placement stability." – AFA Cymru, *Improving Placement Stability: Good Practice Guide (2022).*

7.1 Key Practice Considerations:

Support for potential carers during the assessment process

Some connected persons foster carers have described the assessment process as frightening, lonely and intrusive. Every care should be taken to ensure the process is as supportive, kind and respectful as possible. Please see section 9.1 and 9.1.2 for further guidance.

Transparency and Expectations

Carers should be given a blank copy of the assessment framework/paperwork used and be informed of the assessment purpose, the regulations under which the assessment is being undertaken and any decision-making tools utilised, such as the AFKA Cymru Competency Framework: Skills and Qualities for Kinship Foster Carers in Wales

Potential carers should be made aware if there is any aspect of their lifestyle or a household member's lifestyle or other issues which may impact on the recommendation made so that they can have the opportunity to commit to, and evidence, change. Clear guidance helps manage expectations and supports fairness.

Whilst it can be difficult to support potential connected persons foster carers to understand the expectations of the role of foster carer, this must be a key consideration during the assessment, especially if they have not had the opportunity to attend preparation training, as misunderstandings or disagreements regarding expectations post approval can serve to erode positive working relationships.



Confidentiality and Data Sharing

Assessment reports for court and fostering panel purposes should be handled ethically. Connected persons foster carers should not have their full assessment reports routinely shared with all court parties, and they should receive the same due consideration for their data and privacy as mainstream foster carers.

> **"They have a copy of my assessment under their bed, it has all my health history and details of my banks and savings, at times they use it against me".**

Sensitive information, such as detailed financial or health assessments, should not be routinely disclosed to all court parties, instead the court report should give the local authority's view based on an analysis of the detailed information. Detailed information can then be stored in case file information and provided only if necessary and where all data protection principles have been adhered to.

Legal teams should avoid blanket disclosure assumptions. Assessors should carefully consider the impact upon family dynamics following disclosure of assessment documents, engaging the family court to request redactions where necessary.

Potential kinship carers should be made fully aware of exactly what will happen to their information at the point they provide consent in the understanding that the words 'shared with' can have multiple meanings – the exact nature should be explained.

Adult Child Reference Information

When an adult child of a potential kinship carer refuses to provide a reference or consent to local authority checks related to their childhood the assessor should support the kinship carer to make a Subject Access Request. This can be made for the potential kinship carer to access information about themselves that is held on their adult child's file.

Whilst local authorities can at times be reluctant to provide this information it should be possible to access, redacted where necessary, provided that the request is not disproportionate or breaching the child's privacy.

Support Planning

Identifying support needs should be an integral part of all connected persons assessments, an approach advocated in the Coram BAAF Form K framework and supported by the AFKA Cymru Kinship Carer Support Plan, see section 9.1.5 for further details.

Support identified at approval must be realistic and deliverable. When using independent or sessional assessors unfamiliar with local resources, the local authority should co-develop any action or support plan.

Maintaining a Child-Centred Approach

Assessing social workers should work in collaboration with the child's social worker to develop a well-rounded understanding of the child's history, needs, lived experience and reflecting the child's wishes and feelings. Where appropriate, and in the child's best interests, this may include direct contact between the assessing social worker and the child.

The primary focus of the assessment must remain firmly on the child—ensuring that their current and future needs are carefully considered and that these are meaningfully matched to the potential carer's capacity and circumstance, identifying what support may be required to make the placement safe, nurturing, and sustainable.



Midpoint Reviews
Consider including a midpoint review as standard practice to provide feedback, build trust, and clarify outstanding issues.

Multiple Assessments Within Families
When the same assessor is evaluating multiple family members, each assessment must remain neutral and stand independently. Assessors should not compare applicants or assume one is preferable over another.

Cross-Locality Considerations
If a carer lives in a different area from the child, decisions should weigh the impact of relocation against the strength of pre-existing relationships and the child's wishes and feelings. Overseas assessments are considered in section 6.

Pre-birth Assessments
Assessments before birth may not focus on an existing relationship with the child but should explore the carer's capacity to promote identity, cultural needs, a sense of belonging and provide unconditional love. Due consideration to predicted needs, including those that may arise from the pre-birth environment, must be made. Further information on involvement of potential kinship carers during pre-birth assessment work can be found in section 2.8.

Considering and Supporting Parents
It is essential that assessors remain mindful of the experiences and needs of the child's parents throughout the assessment process. Kinship care arrangements often involve complex family histories, and the impact on parents — including feelings of loss, exclusion, or unresolved trauma — can significantly affect family relationships, contact, and the stability of the placement. Sensitively considering the parent's perspective not only promotes fairness but also helps ensure that the child's broader family network remains a source of connection and support. For further guidance on working respectfully and supportively with parents, see the Support Section 9.1.4: Considering and Supporting Parents in Kinship Care Assessments.

7.2 Key Assessment Domains

All social work assessments should be robust and evidence based. A range of sources should be used to triangulate evidence, extending beyond the minimum requirements of the assessment schedule if necessary. Any information which is self-report should be clearly identified.

Local authorities across Wales utilise different assessment paperwork which can serve as useful tools for practitioners navigating these complex assessments. Any assessment paperwork should be legally compliant to the relevant assessment schedules and address the key assessment domains.

Coram BAAF provide detailed guidance regarding undertaking kinship assessments, both through the guidance within their **Kinship Assessment Framework (Form K)** and also in the accompanying book Undertaking a Kinship Assessment using Form K (2025). In the near future a version of this framework specific to the Welsh context will be available.

Assessors undertaking connected persons assessments should be appropriately experienced and have training to enable them to effectively manage the potential challenges and ensure robust high quality assessment work. Training providers and support for assessors can be found in section 10.



The following domains are regarded as the most critical:

1. Capacity to Meet the Child's Needs
Assess the potential carer's ability to provide safety, emotional warmth, stability, stimulation, and consistent boundaries. Consider their capacity to promote the child's resilience, positive identity, and recovery from trauma, including support with life story work and navigating issues of diversity. Explore their ability to facilitate and sustain positive relationships with the child's parents, siblings, wider family, and key figures.

2. The Child-Carer Relationship
Establish the child's wishes and feelings, considering any pressures influencing them. Explore the quality of any existing relationship, including observations of time spent together. If a relationship is not yet formed, assess the carer's potential to develop a meaningful bond, implications for identity/belonging/permanence and consider a supported introduction plan. Highlight the protective value of established relationships.

3. Personal History and Attributes
Understand the carer's own childhood experiences, parenting journey, and relationships, past and present. Evaluate their ability to reflect, accept areas of difficulty, and prioritise the child's current and future needs. Explore their emotional resilience, commitment, and capacity to offer emotional, relational and practical stability throughout the child's development.

4. Understanding of the Role and Its Impact
Assess the carer's understanding of what the role entails, including implications for their life course and identity as a 'parent'. Consider their ability to work with professionals, manage contact arrangements, share difficult information, and support the child's understanding of their history. Where needed: clarify their awareness of the differences between fostering, special guardianship, and child arrangements orders.

5. Motivation and Commitment
Explore the motivation to care for the child. It should be rooted in a genuine commitment to the child's wellbeing, not solely obligation or pressure. Assess understanding of permanence and the long-term nature of the role, including their ability to understand and respond to behaviours linked to the child's experiences. Consider health, age, location and contingency plans.

6. Family Dynamics
Examine the wider family system and relationships, including the role of each household member. Assess whether the family can adapt to prioritise the child and manage shifting roles and responsibilities. Hold family meetings where appropriate and explore informal and formal sources of support. Ensure both carers are fully assessed where care will be shared.

7. Relationship with Birth Parents
Assess the carer's ability to protect the child from known risks, including their understanding of those risks and ability to maintain clear, safe boundaries. Evaluate their ability to manage contact appropriately and resist collusion. Consider whether the parents will accept the carer's role and whether the carer can support the child in navigating this relationship safely and confidently.

8. Support and Potential
Focus not only on current capacity, but on potential—what the carer could achieve with the right support. Assessors must recognise the significance of prior life experiences, values, and informal strengths that can be built upon. Support planning should be central to the assessment, addressing any vulnerabilities proactively.

7.2 Ensuring Sufficient Time for a Robust Connected Persons Assessment

A number of serious case reviews have highlighted the risks of insufficiently robust assessments in kinship care. While some of these reviews relate to special guardianship, the learning applies equally to fostering assessments.

Key concerns include the approval of carers without a pre-existing relationship with the child, the underestimation of risks and care needs, overreliance on self-reporting, failure to consider the impact of carers' own childhood experiences, and the omission of critical checks such as enhanced DBS and referee interviews (Cleaver and Rose, 2020, CoramBAAF).

These cases underscore the importance of thorough, balanced assessments that are evidence-informed, fully explore both strengths and vulnerabilities, and remain child-centred throughout.

Timescales

A full kinship assessment is a complex task requiring time to build relationships, explore sensitive issues, and assess the capacity of a family member to care for a child throughout their minority.

The current regulatory framework acknowledges that assessments for the suitability to become foster carers require a reasonable period of time, where under Regulation 26 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015, a local authority may approve a relative, friend, or connected person as a temporary foster carer for up to **16 weeks,** with the possibility of a further 8 week extension**.** This enables urgent placements while allowing time for a more detailed assessment to be completed.

However, the pursuit of the 26 week timetable imposed by the Public Law Outline, and, in some cases, the pursuit of the completion of a set of care proceedings in an even shorter period, has led to practitioners reporting that they are being directed by the courts to undertake assessments in very short periods of time.

The **revised Public Law Outline (PLO, 2024**) reinforces the importance of **early identification** of family members, ideally before proceedings begin. Parents are expected to name any potential carers by or within one week of the Case Management Hearing (CMH), which should take place be**tween Day 12 and Day 18 of proceedings. A 'Think Kinship'** approach and early family group meetings as advocated in section 2 can support this.

Even with early planning, however, it is not uncommon for potential carers to come forward later in proceedings. Courts have recognised that in such circumstances, extensions to the 26-week timetable may be necessary to ensure a full and fair assessment. In Re S (A Child) [2014] EWCC B44 (Fam), the President stated that the emergence of a realistic family carer late in proceedings is a valid reason for extending the court timetable. Similarly, in Re P-S (Children) [2018] EWCA Civ 1407, the court held that **fair process and the child's welfare must not be compromised by concerns about delay or court performance targets.**

The Family Justice Council's interim guidance (2019) and subsequent Best Practice Guidance on the Use of Special Guardianship Orders (Public Law Working Group, 2020) **emphasised the need for a 12-week minimum** to complete a full kinship assessment. This timeframe reflects what is required to undertake a robust, evidence-based assessment, particularly where both fostering and special guardianship are being considered concurrently.





Challenges and Risks of Compressed Timescales

Where practitioners are asked to complete assessments in significantly shorter periods, it is essential to highlight the associated risks and limitations to the court. These include:

1. **Complexity**
   Kinship assessments involve exploring deep and often sensitive family dynamics, history, and potential. They are rarely straightforward and are more complex than most mainstream fostering or adoption assessments.

2. **Insufficient Time for Reflection**
   Potential carers need space to process what the role entails, seek advice, and reflect on the impact on their lives and the child's.

3. **Lack of Relationship Building**
   A sound assessment relies on a trusting relationship between assessor and carer. This relationship enables honest discussion of difficult issues, as well as the opportunity to support and challenge. This cannot be rushed.

4. **Compromised Safeguards**
   Important elements such as referee interviews and triangulated checks may be undermined by having to complete them prematurely, before vulnerabilities have fully emerged.

5. **Limited Opportunity for Change**
   Where carers may need to make changes to lifestyle or parenting approaches, compressed timescales can deny them the opportunity to demonstrate growth and potential.

Practical Considerations

To reduce the likelihood of rushed assessments:

- Use pre-proceedings time effectively to identify, meet, and where possible begin assessing potential carers (see sections 2 & 5).

Despite best practice, new potential carers may still emerge late in the process. If a practitioner has not had the time to undertake a full and robust assessment in the circumstances and time provided they should:

- Clearly outline in their evidence what elements of the assessment are incomplete or compromised.
- Explain the implications of proceeding with the identified limitations.
- Provide a realistic, evidence-based timeframe for completing the work.

It is then for the court to determine whether an extension to the timetable is justified in the child's best interests.

Aligning Court and Local Authority Timelines

There can be tension between court deadlines and internal local authority processes (such as panel dates or approval procedures). An operational overview is needed to ensure these systems are joined up, so that internal processes do not delay or obstruct the timely progression of assessments once commenced.

7.3 Outcomes and Next steps

The outcome of any kinship assessment must be communicated with empathy, clarity, and respect. Whether the recommendation is positive or negative, this moment can carry significant emotional weight for the potential kinship carer and must be handled with care.

Sharing and Finalising the Report:
Before the assessment is finalised, the potential kinship carer should be offered the opportunity to review a draft of the report. They should be invited to identify any factual inaccuracies and provide comments. Once finalised, a copy of the completed report must be shared with them. This step supports transparency, fosters trust, and ensures the carer is fully informed.



7.4 Good Practice Following a Negative Assessment:

A negative outcome should never diminish the importance of the connected person's willingness to step forward for the child. Wherever possible:

- Acknowledge their commitment and the strengths they brought to the process.
- Consider and record any ongoing role they may be able to play in the child's life (e.g. offering informal support, babysitting or short breaks).
- Clearly outline the administrative and/or court processes that follow, including how decision-making will occur and how the carer can engage in that.
- Inform carers of their right to access the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), if applicable, and how to do so, including signposting them to the IRM webpage: Home | IRM Cymru
- Where the child is already placed with the carer, it is essential to explain the role of the court in determining the outcome, and to reference the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015, which allow time for legal and placement decisions to be considered following a negative assessment.
- Be mindful of the emotional impact on the carer, particularly where children are already in placement. Assessors should consider whether there is a need for support (including counselling or advocacy), and signpost appropriately. Where the local authority is unable to provide support, carers should be directed to independent support lines. The current lack of independent support for carers temporarily approved under Regulation 26 remains a significant gap in provision.

Supporting Ethical and Transparent Practice:

Where a negative assessment is made:

- If the connected person wishes to, good practice would be to follow the administrative process (including decision-making and opportunity to make representations), rather than relying solely on court proceedings. This allows the connected person to fully understand and respond to the recommendation.
- Be open about how decision-making works, including the roles of the assessing social worker, decision-maker, panel, and court.
- Remain honest and kind throughout the assessment process, offering feedback in a timely and compassionate way. This helps avoid shock or confusion at the outcome.
- Take care to explain clearly and respectfully the concerns or vulnerabilities identified, and how these have informed the recommendation.

Managing Professional Pressures:

Assessors may feel hesitant to share a negative outcome, especially where previous assessments have been overturned by courts or decision-makers. These experiences can impact professional confidence and relationships with carers. However, avoiding difficult conversations can undermine trust, damage working relationships, and negatively impact the carer's wellbeing. It is important to:

- Balance honesty with empathy throughout the process.
- Keep carers informed of concerns as they arise.
- Maintain professional integrity while recognising the complexity of the wider legal and practice context.



8 The Role of Foster Panel and Decision Maker

Under the Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions (Wales) Regulations 2018 it is for the panel and decision maker to make a recommendation and decision respectively as to whether a potential kinship carer is suitable to be a foster carer for a particular child or sibling group. This recommendation and decision is based upon all the checks, including an enhanced DBS check and references required by the regulations and a detailed assessment from the medical adviser, based on information from the applicants themselves and their GP.

The process of making a decision whether to approve an applicant as a foster carer is subject to the guidance set out in the case Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM [2009] EWHC 328 (Admin).

The regulations do not differentiate between mainstream and connected person foster carer approval. The process of approval remains the same – that under regulation 8 there has to be a completed assessment of suitability and the foster panel has to consider the application.

The difference for connected persons foster carers lies in the terms of that approval. Under reg 8(5)(a) the fostering service provider must decide on terms of approval and specify, in writing, those terms of approval, which will be that they are approved as suitable to be a foster carer for a named child / sibling group.

A concession is given to connected persons foster carer under reg 7(11) if they, or a member of their household, is a relative of the child, they may not be deemed as automatically unsuitable if they have been found guilty of a number of offences.

Panels and decision makers can struggle with applying the full force of the regulations and scrutiny of 'suitability' for a connected person, particularly where the child has already been placed under reg 26 CPPCR(W)R 2015.

Panels and decision makers are helped with this process if they concentrate on the individual needs of the child(ren) concerned, for these carers are only being assessed and approved to care for this particular child.

The strengths of the existing relationship, knowledge of and contact with family members, belonging, permanence and identity gained from remaining within the wider kinship network, may be balanced against the vulnerabilities of the carers compared with mainstream applicants.

Some fostering services in Wales, along with the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) panel, have chosen to support their decision-making by applying an adapted set of competencies for connected persons fostering recommendations. These were developed by AFKA Cymru in 2022 to reflect the distinct nature of connected persons foster care and the specific contexts in which connected persons are assessed.

AFKA Cymru has recently updated the 2022 competencies to the **AFKA Cymru Competency Framework: Skills and Qualities for Kinship Foster Carers in Wales**, which now aligns with the Welsh regulatory and policy framework for connected persons foster care as well as incorporating learning from serious case reviews. The updated competencies are accompanied by guidance and are designed to be accessible and meaningful for both current and potential connected persons foster carers.

While the use of competencies provides helpful guidance for assessment and support, it is important to note that they are not prescribed by regulation or statutory guidance.

The approval of a connected person foster carer is an administrative decision – it lies with the local authority, not the family court. However, the case of **re T (A Child) [2018] EWCA Civ 650** held that, although the court cannot dictate to the local authority what its care plan should be, the court can expect a high level of respect (by the local authority) for the court's assessment of risk and welfare, leading in almost every case to those assessments being put into effect (that is approval of a potential connected person foster carer if the court assesses favourably).

Also the local authority cannot refuse to provide lawful and reasonable services that would be necessary to support the court's decision (that the applicant is suitable) if by doing so it would either breach the article 8 rights of the family concerned or its decision making process was unlawful on public law grounds (i.e. if it was unreasonable not to provide a particular level of service).

Fostering panels and decision makers must ensure that current and potential connected persons foster carers are offered the support necessary to meet the expectations of the role, as outlined in the foster care agreement, the policies required under The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018, and any competency frameworks or standards adopted by the fostering service.

Applicants should only be considered unsuitable where they are unable to meet these requirements even with appropriate support (see **Knowsley MBC v X and Ors [2018] EWFC 42**). Distinct support plans can help to evidence both the support needs identified and how they might be met, or, where relevant, where it is not possible to support the carer to meet the required standards.

Where it is assessed that a potential or current connected persons foster carer could meet the requirements with some support or services, these should be clearly set out within the report (whether assessment or review) and associated support plan.

Where a panel's recommendation is made in the context of identified support needs and the kinship carer's engagement with a support plan, fostering services, panels and decision makers may wish to give particular consideration to:

- The carer's commitment to engaging with the proposed support and how this has been evidenced;
- Whether funding or resource implications have been addressed;
- Whether an early review may be helpful to monitor the implementation and impact of the support plan.

For further detail on support planning, please see section 9.1.5.

Negative Assessments: Practice Considerations

The decision-maker has the authority to reach a different conclusion from that recommended by the fostering panel. As demonstrated in the Re T case, it is not uncommon for family courts to assert their own judgement regarding risk and welfare, sometimes leading to alternative outcomes.

Where a fostering panel has recommended that a kinship carer is not suitable to foster, and this recommendation is subsequently overturned by the decision-maker, careful attention should be given to the ongoing working relationships—between the panel, decision-maker, assessor and fostering service— and crucially to the evolving relationship with the kinship carer.

In some local authorities, decision-makers provide a written rationale when they do not accept the panel's or assessor's recommendation. This may be shared with the panel and assessor and, where appropriate, the decision-maker may attend a panel meeting to support mutual understanding. This transparent approach can strengthen professional confidence and ensure that all parties understand the reasoning behind decisions.

Constructive, respectful dialogue is key. Providing clear, balanced feedback and acknowledging the complexity and professional judgement involved in such assessments can help maintain panel members and assessors' confidence and promote reflective learning. A culture of professional curiosity, mutual respect, and shared responsibility across the system supports robust, child-centred decision-making.

Fostering panels should also remain sensitive to the emotional impact on carers who return to panel for a subsequent review after an initial negative outcome. Language, tone, and approach are crucial. Even where difficult decisions have been made, panels should seek to build respectful and constructive relationships, recognising that carers may feel judged or unsupported.

Please see good practice recommendations for assessments with negative outcomes, including those that are upheld by the decision maker in section 7.4.





9 Preparation, Learning & Development and Support

9.1 Pre-Approval: Preparation, Learning & Development, and Support

A child-focused, collaborative, and transparent approach to working with kinship families must begin early. Unlike mainstream fostering applicants, kinship carers often have limited time or opportunity to prepare. Services should aim to reduce this disparity by offering preparation training at the earliest opportunity—ideally before the assessment begins, alongside opportunity to participate in family group meetings: see section 3.

Relationship-based practice at the initial stages is key to building trust and laying the foundation for effective collaboration between kinship fostering families and local authorities. As one carer reflected:

> **"It was the way she explained the checks and requirements … she understood my dynamics … she was a shoulder to cry on".**

Some local authorities provide in-house preparation training or commission it from specialist providers. Others utilise existing mainstream foster carer preparation courses. **Wherever possible, potential kinship carers should have access to high-quality, kinship-specific preparation training.**

In 2022, Welsh Government funded the development and delivery of a free, nationwide preparation course for potential kinship carers by AFKA Cymru. This course was developed through extensive consultation with the kinship care sector in Wales , including connected persons foster carers, special guardians and specialist kinship practitioners.

> **"I love how the course made me feel about being a foster carer and just to know that the job I'm doing is so important to myself and the child"**

Development and delivery of this course highlighted the value of early, high-quality learning opportunities which are tailored to the needs of kinship carers and include a thorough understanding of the system and process in Wales.

> **" … I just wish I'd have had access to this information right from day one … it was very confusing and overwhelming at the beginning, but all of this information lays it out in a really accessible way".**

Even with training, the assessment process must retain an educative function—supporting carers to reflect on their learning and apply it to the specific needs of the child. If training cannot be accessed prior to assessment, social workers should ensure carers still receive essential information through the assessment process, despite the challenges posed by time-limited court proceedings.

Some local authorities have developed a range of easy-to-read leaflets that can be provided before and during assessment to support potential kinship carers to understand the process.

Where significant gaps in learning remain at the point of approval, these should be clearly identified in the assessment report, with implications explored and addressed in the carer's support and learning and development plans.

Assessing practitioners must also be equipped with quality learning opportunities that enhance their ability to integrate reflective, educative practice into kinship assessments.

Peer learning through practitioner forums is another key tool in developing strong, consistent preparation and assessment practice across services, details can be found in section 10.

Good Practice: Information for Potential Kinship Carers Prior to Assessment

Potential kinship carers should receive clear, accessible information before an assessment begins, or where late identification and pressing timescales have prevented this, as soon as possible in the process.

Practitioners should ensure that any written material is explained and discussed, using plain language and checking understanding, with appropriate translation, advocacy or visual tools where necessary.

The following may be provided during a preparation course and/or complemented by local authority written materials:

- A plain-language explanation of what the assessment involves, including the difference between a **viability assessment** and a **full assessment.**
- A **blank copy of the assessment form** so carers know what to expect.
- Information on **the legal and regulatory framework** governing the assessment, with links or directions to relevant regulations/schedules.
- A copy of any **decision-making frameworks** used, such as the **AFKA Cymru Competency Framework: Skills and Qualities for Kinship Foster Carers in Wales**.
- A checklist of **checks and references** required (e.g. DBS, medical, financial), including why they are needed.
- Information on **financial support** available and how this is determined.
- A written outline of:
  - **What the local authority will expect** from the carer during the assessment.
  - **What the carer can expect** from the local authority.
- A clear explanation of the different legal orders available to kinship carers and summary of possible assessment outcomes and how these outcomes could affect the child's care plan.
- **Contact details** for:
  - Relevant teams and practitioners
  - Local and national **third sector organisations** who provide support
- How to access **legal and welfare benefits** advice and information about local authority support or funding for these
- A plain-language explanation of **confidentiality, data sharing, and the meaning of party status** in care proceedings. This must explain exactly what will happen to the carer's sensitive information, including health and financial assessments to ensure informed consent.
- The **role and responsibilities** of a foster carer and, if relevant, a special guardian, including PR, decision making, delegated authority, safer caring or protective care, safeguarding, foster care agreement and placement agreement.
- The **impact of assessment outcomes** on the carer's relationship with the child and wider family dynamics including manging contact / keeping in touch.
- Understanding the impact of **loss, trauma and basics of attachment theory**: Impact on current and future potential needs of the child and introduction to therapeutic parenting techniques to meet such needs.
- Recognise the importance of **life journey work** and explore support needs in relation to helping children understand their story.
- How the local authority will **support the carer throughout the assessment**, including emotional support and practical help.
- How the **assessment may feel** emotionally, and what options the carer has to be supported through the process.

9.1.2 Support During Assessment

It must always be remembered that potential kinship carers may be in the midst of a family crisis, could be experiencing feelings of grief, loss, obligation, stress or fear alongside possibly caring for the children in question.

> **"It can be a frightening, lonely experience, someone to bring along, to have the company of a friend, to feel more comfortable, we should be able to have this".**

These circumstances can make it difficult to formulate thoughts and to retain important information. Potential connected persons foster carers should not have to face an assessment process alone and every effort should be made to ensure they are properly supported.

This may include offering them the opportunity to be accompanied by a supportive friend or family member during assessment visits where appropriate, or signposting to helplines and third sector support services.

It may also be of benefit for potential kinship carers to obtain peer support or mentoring from other approved kinship foster carers.

Potential kinship carers should be given information regarding how to access legal and welfare benefits advice and information about local authority support or funding for these.

Remember they may become foster carers and how they feel during an assessment process will set the foundations for the ongoing relationship with the fostering service.



9.1.3 Support for the Panel Process

Attending a fostering panel can feel daunting for prospective connected persons foster carers, particularly following an intensive assessment process. It is important that carers are well-prepared, understand the purpose of the panel, and know what to expect. Assessing social workers should provide clear information, answer questions, and offer reassurance, while also supporting carers to reflect on their experience of assessment.

Where appropriate, carers should be offered the opportunity to bring a supporter with them and discuss any specific needs that may affect their participation. Supporting carers in this way can promote a sense of dignity, respect, and inclusion, helping to build confidence and trust in the fostering process.

9.1.4 Considering and Supporting Parents in Kinship Care Assessments

Kinship care arrangements inevitably involve wider family dynamics that can be emotionally complex, particularly for parents whose children are being cared for by relatives. From the outset of assessment, it is essential to recognise and respond sensitively to the needs and experiences of parents, many of whom may have their own histories of trauma, loss, and fractured family relationships.

Support for parents should not be seen as separate to the assessment of kinship carers — it is integral to promoting placement stability, safe contact, and long-term wellbeing for the child.

Understanding Family Dynamics

Where a parent experienced harm, neglect, or trauma in their own upbringing, it can be deeply painful and confusing to see their child placed with the very family members they feel contributed to that experience. Practitioners must take time to explore these dynamics with compassion and without judgement. Parents may need help to understand how and why a relative might now be considered able to provide safe and secure care — support that can be crucial in avoiding conflict and enabling a positive, ongoing relationship with the carer and the child.

The Importance of Inclusion and Communication

Parents commonly describe feeling excluded, isolated, or unsupported during the assessment process — particularly where there is limited or no communication with the family member being assessed. One parent supported by Barnardo's Reflect project in Wales shared:

> **"There was no communication between my family that was being assessed and myself as the birth parent. I felt it was an awful experience. The only thing that supported me was Barnardo's Reflect."**

Poor communication can lead to long-term fractures within the family, complicating contact arrangements and reducing stability for the child. Practitioners should consider ways to maintain appropriate communication and include parents in planning, especially around contact and future relationships.

Common Challenges for Parents in Kinship Care

Research from the organisation Pause Kinship-care-paper-DIGITAL-1.pdf highlights several challenges birth parents may face when their children are placed with family members:

1. **Unresolved Trauma and Relationship Strain**
   Parents may feel hurt or resentful if children are placed with the same relatives who were unable to care safely for them. This can raise questions of fairness and undermine trust in services.

2. **Double Loss**
   The loss of a child into kinship care may also involve the loss of relationships with family members, leading to isolation, grief, and a breakdown in support networks.

3. **Domestic Abuse**
   Some parents remain in unsafe relationships due to fears that leaving may affect their ability to maintain contact with children placed with their partner's family.

4. **Lack of Information or Voice in the Process**
Parents may feel rushed to nominate relatives for assessment or unclear about what special guardianship involves. This can lead to regret or conflict later.

5. **Financial Barriers to Contact**
When children are placed at a distance, the costs of travel and supervised contact can be prohibitive for parents, especially where no financial support is available to sustain contact.

What Practitioners Should Consider:

- **A Whole-Family Lens**

Consider the emotional needs of the parent alongside those of the kinship carer and the child. The quality of family relationships can have a direct impact on placement stability and the child's experience of care.

- **Early and Clear Communication**

Ensure that parents understand the assessment process and their rights. Where appropriate, support safe, facilitated communication between parents and the family member being assessed.

- **Specialist Support**

Where possible, refer parents to services such as Barnardo's Reflect or other therapeutic or advocacy support. Specialist support can help parents process loss, rebuild relationships, and remain involved in their child's life.

- **Contact Planning**

Begin contact planning early. Assessors should consider not just what contact is possible now, but how it might be maintained or developed over time. Barriers such as cost, transport, or strained relationships should be openly explored.

- **Sensitivity and Respect**

Language matters. Refer to parents and family members respectfully and without assumptions. Acknowledge the strength it takes for families to navigate these circumstances and strive to keep the child's whole family network in view.

9.1.5 Identifying Learning, Development and Support Needs

Assessing support needs should be an integral part of every kinship assessment. Currently it is not common practice across Wales for foster carers, whether connected persons or mainstream to have a distinct support plan, more commonly their support needs are identified within a learning and development plan or identified in assessment or annual review paperwork and followed through in supervision sessions.

However it is recognised that many kinship carers have support needs that need to be addressed specifically, particularly where these needs are integral to suitability recommendations and in recognition of the case law (Knowsley MBC v X and Ors [2018] EWFC 42, see section 8 for further details) A clear distinct support plan ensures that kinship carers, panel and DM have a clear understanding of how any identified vulnerabilities will be mitigated and support needs met.

The **Coram BAAF Kinship Care Assessment (Form K)** will soon be available for use in Wales, this assessment framework ensures that support needs are integral to the assessment, which would be considered incomplete without a support plan. **The AFKA Cymru Kinship Carer Support Plan**, with accompanying guidance, is compatible with this assessment framework and can be used throughout the assessment and annual review process to record and contextualise support needs.

The AFKA Cymru Kinship Carer Support Plan aligns with the Welsh Government-endorsed **All Wales Special Guardianship Support Plan**, supporting consistency across fostering panel and court processes and reducing duplication. For services using **the AFKA Cymru Competency Framework: Skills and Qualities for Kinship Foster Carers in Wales**, the plan is fully mapped to this framework.

Any support plan or action plan identifying how support needs will be met should be **developed collaboratively** between the kinship carer, fostering service, child's social worker, and where appropriate, the child. **All contributors should be clearly identified and sign agreements for provision of support.**

When independent or sessional social workers conduct the kinship assessment, collaborative support planning ensures expectations are realistic and achievable.

Any identified areas for learning and development should be reflected in the NFF Post-Approval Learning and Development Plan ensuring this works in tandem with any support or action plan identified.

Addressing Concerns About Resource Implications

Local authorities may have concerns that introducing distinct support planning for kinship carers could result in increased resource demands. However, this is not the intention—nor should it be the outcome. A tailored support plan is not about creating additional entitlement but about ensuring that the unique needs of kinship families are recognised, thoughtfully considered, and planned for.

Distinct support planning enables assessors and carers to work together to understand what the future may hold, identify available support within the carer's own network, anticipate potential challenges, and clarify what level of local authority support may reasonably be expected. This transparency helps kinship carers feel prepared, valued, and confident in their role—contributing directly to placement stability and child wellbeing.

Children placed with connected persons foster carers are looked after children, and as such, they must have a robust Part 6 care and support plan that reflects their needs. Connected persons foster carers should be supported on an equal footing with mainstream carers by the fostering service. Where needs are identified that cannot be met through existing structures, these should be recorded and considered through the local authority's decision-making processes to determine whether additional support is reasonable and lawful.



Importantly, support planning enables both carers and local authorities to identify and address unmet needs early - reducing the risk of placement breakdowns. Practitioners often describe situations where children, after experiencing multiple moves in mainstream care, are eventually placed with a kinship carer who was overlooked at the start. A proactive, strengths-based approach to support planning helps avoid such scenarios and offers a more stable, child-centred route from the outset.

Current and Potential Future Needs

Support plans should address both immediate and anticipated needs, particularly those related to the child's experiences of trauma, loss, grief, or separation.

Plans must consider how the carer's circumstances and the child's needs may evolve as the child grows, especially during key transitions such as starting secondary school, adolescence, exams, and the move toward independence.

Adolescence can present challenges for all families and is a period of increased risk for placement instability. Ongoing support to develop the skills and qualities needed to care for teenagers should be available throughout the child's minority.

Placement Stability

Promoting placement stability should be a core focus of support for connected persons foster carers.

The Good Practice Guide: Improving Placement Stability for Children Looked After in Foster Placements (AFKA Cymru and Welsh Government) provides a practical framework for fostering services to plan targeted support and interventions. The **AFKA Cymru Kinship Carer Support Plan** complements this guide by addressing the key stability factors.

Chapters 5 and 6 are especially relevant to connected persons foster care, highlighting the importance of:

- Promoting the wellbeing of both children and carers
- Supporting effective life journey work
- Building and sustaining positive relationships
- Listening to the child's wishes and feelings
- Offering respite or natural breaks
- Strengthening support networks
- Providing reflective supervision and learning

Education, Employment and Career Plans

Fostering carries a level of uncertainty. Plans for children can change, income from fostering cannot always be guaranteed, and a foster carer's ongoing suitability is reviewed annually.

Connected foster carers must have a clear understanding of the nature of fostering before making significant changes to their education or employment plans.

Where a carer wishes to remain in work or education, fostering services should explore whether this is compatible with the fostering role. This includes identifying any additional support needs and confirming whether these can be met.

Carers who are employed should be informed of their workplace rights, including:

- The right to request flexible working – Employees with 26 weeks' continuous service can request changes to hours, timing or location of work. Flexible working: Overview - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Time off for dependants – All employees are entitled to unpaid emergency leave to respond to unexpected situations involving a child or dependent. Time off for family and dependants Time off for family and dependants: Your rights - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)



Some connected foster carers may continue in employment or education alongside their fostering role. Others may pause or adjust plans to take on the role, with a view to returning to work or study later. Some may go on to apply as mainstream foster carers in future.

Fostering services should ensure connected foster carers have access to the same career-enhancing opportunities as mainstream carers, including support to complete the Induction framework for health and social care | Social Care Wales or other accredited learning.

Awareness of Other Factors
Support needs should be assessed holistically, with practitioners remaining curious and sensitive to any other caring roles a current or potential kinship carer may hold.

This includes **unpaid care for other adults within the family network**. Where the adult being cared for is also the parent of the child, the impact of the proposed fostering arrangement on their care must be carefully considered.

If a kinship carer is identified as an unpaid carer, they should be signposted to the local authority's carers' service for information, advice and assistance. This enables immediate access to relevant support groups, benefit advice, and information about Carer's Allowance and other entitlements, it may lead to the offer or request of a carer's assessment.

Many kinship carers face **financial pressures**, often managing on limited incomes. Fostering services should ensure that current and potential kinship carers are signposted to appropriate advice and guidance to help maximise their income and access all relevant financial support, including benefits and entitlements.

Confidentiality
A support or action plan may contain sensitive or confidential information, and all legal and ethical duties should be met before any plan is shared, including seeking the kinship carer's consent. If necessary, the plan should reference the assessment report rather than duplicate sensitive details.

9.2 Post-Approval: Ongoing Learning and Development

Learning and development should be a continuous process that supports kinship foster carers in gaining the knowledge and skills needed to meet the child's current and future needs. Post-approval learning is **most effective when grounded in the values of collaboration, empathy, and transparency,** and when it **acknowledges the unique journey each kinship carer has taken.**

For mainstream foster carers, the decision to foster is usually proactive—they often attend information sessions, conduct research, and prepare for the demands of the role before making a formal application. **Their identity as a foster carer is typically well established** by the time they begin caring for children, and learning and development is viewed as a natural and expected part of the role.

In contrast, **connected foster carers do not usually set out to become foster carers.** Their role often arises from an urgent family situation, and their motivation is usually rooted in a pre-existing relationship with the child. As a result, they may be juggling other responsibilities—such as work, parenting, or caring for others—that do not easily align with the expectations placed on foster carers. **The title 'foster carer' may not resonate with their identity in the same way, and formal training requirements may feel disconnected from their primary focus: caring for their specific child.**

These differences can lead to a **mismatch between a fostering service's expectations and the connected foster carer's capacity or motivation to engage in formal training.** To bridge this gap, learning and development should be t**ailored, purposeful, and rooted in the context of the child's needs and the connected foster carer's circumstances.**



The **NFF Post Approval Learning and Development Framework for Foster Carers** in Wales provides a foundation for this approach. It sets out the following core values for fostering services who must ensure their learning opportunities for foster carers are:

- Exciting and stimulating
- Accessible to all learners using formal, self-guided and blended learning opportunities
- Delivered in a way that takes account of physical needs, language, geography, working patters, childcare etc.
- Delivered within a framework of equal opportunities and ant-discriminatory practice
- Inclusive of opportunities to train alongside other professionals that they are part of the team around the child

The framework also emphasises a guiding key issue:

> **"How did the learning or development activity contribute to your capacity to meet the needs and improve the outcomes of the child in your care?"**



This child-centred approach allows fostering services to tailor learning and development to the needs of both the carer and the child, and to be responsive to any barriers that kinship carers face in attending formal training.

While it may not be feasible to design fully bespoke learning pathways for every kinship carer, services should explore creative, flexible approaches. This might include recognising learning that occurs through supervision, informal conversations with professionals, peer support, or reflection on day-to-day care experiences.

Rigid requirements—such as minimum hours of formal training—are unlikely to reflect the real learning taking place or to address the key question of improving outcomes for the child.

Instead, the focus should be on how the kinship carer is developing their understanding and practice in response to the child's needs. This includes recognising the development that has taken place in the emotional and relational work involved in managing new boundaries and roles within the family system.

Connected foster carers may need additional support in **understanding the expectations of the fostering role** during their first year of fostering. Particularly where their assessment journey took place during a family crisis, as it often the case, or was swift due to court timescales – both circumstances can make it harder to understand and retain detailed information regarding role and expectations.

Any identified areas for development should be reflected in the Post-Approval Learning and Development Plan ensuring this works in tandem with any support or action plan identified during assessment or annual review.

Learning and development should always be linked to the wider aims of the Child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan and the principles of the Corporate Parenting Charter, ensuring that children grow up in stable, nurturing homes that meet their needs.

Good Practice Considerations: Post Approval Learning and Development

Core Principles

- Learning and development opportunities should be **accessible, relevant and strengths-based,** promoting **a positive identity** and recognising the **lived experience and existing skills** of connected persons foster carers.
- Participation in learning opportunities should be framed as **supportive and empowering**, with clear aims and objectives, not evaluative or corrective.
- Use language that is **non-intimidating and strengths-focused** – consider alternatives to the word 'training' such as 'learning session', 'support workshop' or 'peer development'.
- Recognise barriers such as time, caring commitments, or travel, and offer **flexible formats**, including **online or blended learning.**

Inclusive and Sensitive Integration

- Connected persons foster carers should be **included in the fostering community,** while their distinct needs and experiences are acknowledged and respected.
- **Shared training with mainstream foster carers can be beneficial** when thoughtfully managed. Both groups have knowledge and experience that can be supportive to each other, e.g. understanding family relationships, accessing resources and support.
- **Positive experiences** occur when connected persons foster carers feel accepted and supported in mixed groups.
- **Challenges** arise when connected persons foster carers feel judged or overwhelmed due to their role as family members.

To support inclusive learning environments:

- Provide a clear **orientation and welcome** at mixed training events and prepare mainstream foster carers by raising awareness of the connected persons fostering role.
- Where possible, **team connected persons foster carers together** within mixed sessions to support peer connection.

Kinship-Specific Learning Needs

- Some learning opportunities are best delivered **solely to connected persons foster carers.** Particularly where the focus is on the **unique dynamics of kinship care**, such as **managing family contact** or **undertaking life journey work** within an existing family network.
- Some local authorities and third sector organisations offer **bespoke learning opportunities for kinship carers**, sometimes **delivered alongside special guardians**. Where training is shared, it should include **clear guidance on the differences in legal status, decision-making, and parental responsibility.**

Regional and Joint Approaches

- **Benefits** include improved availability, better value, and shared expertise.
- **Considerations** include travel time and reduced opportunities for building local peer support.

9.3 Post-Approval: Support

Connected foster carers—whether grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, or family friends—require meaningful, ongoing support that reflects both the complexity of their role and their unique position within the family network.

Support should be inclusive, recognising the diverse age, background, and life stage of connected foster carers and be provided on an equal basis to mainstream foster carers.

Connected foster carers should be given information about the full range of support services that the fostering service and local authority is able to access / provide.

Transitions between assessing and supervising social workers must be handled with care, especially when assessments have been completed in tight timeframes.

Many connected foster carers have had little time to understand the fostering system, and entering supervision without a clear understanding of their role can lead to confusion or mistrust.

Within the first three months post-approval, supervisory workers should prioritise building a relationship of trust through collaboration, empathy, and transparency—focusing not just on what is shared, but how.



Fostering Network Membership

All 22 Welsh Local Authorities are in membership with The Fostering Network and foster carer membership of The Fostering Network is part of Foster Wales's national commitment for a consistent offer for foster carers across Wales.

All connected foster carers should be aware of the **membership benefits** available to them through The Fostering Network including access to the **legal and stress helplines and Fosterline Wales.** The Fostering Network also provide foster carers with **webinars** on a range of topics relevant to approved foster carers including tax and mortgages.

Emotional and Psychological Support

Caring for a child following family breakdown, trauma or crisis can place significant emotional strain on connected foster carers — particularly where the carer is grieving, or managing complex relationships with birth parents and extended family.

> **"Either side of the family at different times hate me, it's the loneliest I've ever been. It's all incredibly stressful".**

Many connected foster carers may feel anxious about asking for help, fearing they'll be judged or seen as unsuitable, especially if their assessment experience was shaped by uncertainty or fear.

Supervising workers need a strong understanding of the specific pressures of kinship care and should build relationship-based practice that acknowledges and reduces fear and builds trust.

Trauma-informed supervision should provide safe, regular opportunities to reflect on the emotional impact of the role, to strive to create an environment where challenges can be discussed and support needs identified without blame.

Supervision should promote carer wellbeing and consider any need for:

- Development of a Foster Carer Wellbeing Action Plan
- **Access to counselling or therapeutic services** for carers
- **Specialist advice** and where carers are managing challenging contact, family conflict or any **pressure, threat or bullying** from any adults in the wider network
- **Psychological or other specialist support** to address responding to challenging behaviour, support a child's recovery from traumatic experiences or address secondary trauma, burnout, blocked care, or compassion fatigue.
- **Mediation or relationship support** to promote good quality family time/contact that prioritises the child's needs.
- **Family Group Conference** to assist with mobilising additional support with the child's network / promote placement stability etc.

A compassionate, informed and proactive approach is essential to sustaining placements and safeguarding the wellbeing of both the child and the carer.

Peer Support

Peer support groups should offer a safe, informal space for foster carers to share experiences and gain emotional and practical support. Connected foster carers have reported both positive and negative experiences when attending support groups alongside mainstream foster carers.

Positives include learning from the wide experience of mainstream carers, especially around responding to children's behaviour, navigating systems, and accessing resources. Challenges include feeling misunderstood or struggling to relate, particularly when seeking support for how fostering has reshaped personal family dynamics.

> **"I've never met someone that I felt I could relate to—my family dynamic has changed completely. I need someone I can identify with".**

Kinship carers consistently emphasise the value of connecting with others in similar roles, including connected persons foster carers, special guardians or informal kinship carers.

> **"When I finally found my group, I felt like I was understood. Just that helped so much".**

Kinship carers consistently emphasise the value of connecting with others in similar roles, including connected persons foster carers, special guardians or informal kinship carers.

Peer Support:
Good Practice Considerations

- Enable access to both mainstream foster carer support groups and kinship-specific or connected persons-only groups.
- Signpost to peer support options provided by third sector organisations such as The Fostering Network, Y Bont, and Kinship.
- Actively promote the benefits of peer support to carers who may be hesitant, including opportunities to hear directly from other connected persons foster carers.
- Offer mentoring or buddying schemes to help new carers engage with a supportive community.
- Enable carers to be accompanied by a trusted friend or worker to reduce barriers to participation.

Children's Rights and Access to Support

Research with connected foster carers in England found that sometimes children in these arrangements were unaware they had a social worker or didn't fully understand their rights—highlighting the importance of accessible, practical information. Empowering carers with this knowledge helps ensure children's entitlements are upheld.

Connected foster carers must understand the rights of the children they care for, including:

- The right to independent advocacy
- Regular visits with their social worker
- Access to support to remain in education
- Participation in planning, reviews and decision-making

Information about a children's rights should be provided to the carer and child (where appropriate to age and understanding).

Current materials are often written with children in mainstream foster care in mind, which can make them less relevant or relatable to those living with family or friends. **Good practice recommends providing versions of these guides that reflect the experiences of children in connected persons foster care**—using appropriate tone, language, and examples.

Connected persons foster carers should have a comprehensive understanding of the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, which includes a placement plan and their role within it.

Promoting Consistency and Good Practice Across Wales

Interventions and innovative practice models to support foster carers and kinship families are being developed and utilised across Wales and the wider UK. For example:

- Services across Wales have developed information, advice, guidance and support services designed specifically to address the needs of connected and the children in their care.
- Some local authorities in Wales provide peer support groups and participation forums specifically for children growing up in kinship families.
- Some services in Wales have adopted the Lifelong Links Model Lifelong Links - Family Rights Group to support children in care and care experienced children have a positive loving network to rely in.
- The Foster Network's Fostering Wellbeing programme; Mockingbird programme and Step Up Step Down approach.
- Emerging research is showing promising outcomes for the benefits of foster carers engaging in reflective groups facilitate by trained support staff Reflective Fostering Programme (RFP) | Anna Freud

Wherever possible services across Wales are encouraged to make use of practitioner forums to share good practice and develop consistency of service across Wales – details can be found in section 10.1.



9.4 Post-Approval: Annual Review & Returning to Foster Panel

Connected foster carers should be prepared during assessment to understand the role of the annual review, including its purpose in recognising their progress, identifying any ongoing support needs, and reviewing the effectiveness of learning and development plans. As with all foster carers, an annual review must be completed at least once every 12 months, in line with regulatory requirements.

Many existing annual review tools have been designed with mainstream foster carers in mind and may not reflect the unique experiences of kinship families. Good practice suggests adapting review documentation—particularly feedback tools for children—to ensure they are relevant, accessible, and respectful of the specific context of connected persons foster care.

Where vulnerabilities were identified in the original assessment, or where the carer was initially recommended as unsuitable and later approved, supervision should be used proactively to support reflective learning and open dialogue. Reviews should not become a source of unexpected criticism or conflict.

Supervising social workers should regularly revisit the support plan during supervision to monitor progress, with a clear focus on any areas of development required to meet the child's needs and maintain placement stability.

As with the original panel presentation, any support or advocacy needs in preparing for or attending a fostering panel should be considered in advance. Particular attention should be given to the potential impact on single carers or those who may find panel attendance especially challenging.

Where applicable foster carers should be informed of their right to access the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), and how to do so, including signposting them to the IRM webpage: Home | IRM Cymru

9.5 Considering Special Guardianship Orders

When a kinship carer has been looking after a child for a year or more (this can include time before becoming a connected person's foster carer) they can make an application to become the child's special guardian. Welsh Government have funded detailed guidance for local authorities and foster carers to prepare for any discussion of special guardianship orders. They can be found here:

For practitioners: Guide to Discussing SGO
For foster carers: Guide to Discussing SGO



Additional Information

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10.1 Practitioner Forums and Groups

This list is not exhaustive and subject to change – if you are aware of forum or group that is not represented, please inform info@afkacymru.org

AFKA Cymru run the following **Special Interest Groups (SIGs)** with funding from Welsh Government that reflect key national policies and direction.

- Special Guardian / Connected Persons
- Fostering Team Managers
- Agency Decision Makers / Decision Makers
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Adoption & Foster Panel Chairs & Vice Chairs
- Welsh Medical Advisors
- Welsh Child Care Legal

These groups support best practice by exploring the roles and responsibilities of professionals and teams in achieving better outcomes for children. They offer a space to share good practice, learn from different local authority approaches, access peer support and hear form guest speakers on relevant topics. For more information about attending or contributing, visit the AFKA Cymru website Special Interest Groups - AFKA Cymru

The Fostering Network provide professional practice advice and sector forums as part of their membership for fostering services, you can find out details on their website: Fostering Service Membership | The Fostering Network

Kinship provide a Professionals Network that is open to Welsh practitioners.

10.2 Kinship Carer Forums and Groups

This list is not exhaustive and subject to change – if you are aware of forum or group that is not represented, please inform info@afkacymru.org

Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) and AFKA Cymru facilitate a **Kinship Carer Research and Policy Advisory Group.** This is attended by a group of kinship carers and special guardians with a keen interest in research and policy development. Researchers, policy makers and academics regularly consult with the group to inform their workstreams. Please contact AFKA Cymru to join or consult with the group: info@afkacymru.org

The Fostering Network provide a range of membership benefits to foster carers: Foster & Kinship Carer Membership | The Fostering Network

Y Bont provide groups for kinship carers across specific local authorities in North Wales: Y Bont | Services | Groups

Kinship provide their Kinship Connected program on a commissioned basis in Wales and have opportunities for kinship carers to become involved in peer support an campaigning on their website: Kinship: Home | The Kinship care charity | England and Wales

10.3 Children's Forums and Groups

This list is not exhaustive and subject to change – if you are aware of forum or group that is not represented, please inform info@afkacymru.org

Local authorities across Wales provide participation forums for young people in their areas. Children growing up in connected persons foster care should have equal opportunity to attend these as their mainstream counter parts.

Voices From Care Cymru – Care Experienced Non Profit Organisation is a national, independent, Welsh organisation. They are dedicated to upholding the rights and welfare of care experienced children and young people and provide a number of forums, groups and services to support young people in Wales.

Children in Wales have a dedicated webpage for children and young people: Children & Young People | Children in Wales where they can find out about a range of resources, services and information.

The **Children's Commissioner for Wales** Website Home - Children's Commissioner for Wales has a range of resources and information, including **My Planner - Children's Commissioner for Wales** providing advice, support and tips for young people leaving care.

10.4 The Kinship Care Alliance

AFKA Cymru chair the Wales Sub-group of **The Kinship Care Alliance** - a group of organisations which subscribe to a set of shared aims and beliefs on the issue of family and friends care. The Kinship Care Alliance and associated sub-groups are open to kinship carers and organisations and meet regularly to develop a joint policy agenda and agree strategies to promote our aims: The Kinship Care Alliance - Family Rights Group

10.5 Training, Learning and Development Providers

This list is not exhaustive and subject to change – if you are aware of a provider that is not represented, please inform info@afkacymru.org

The following training providers have courses specifically tailored to kinship care:

AFKA Cymru Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption - AFKA Cymru

Y Bont Y Bont | Helping children, young people and familes

Kinship Kinship: Home | The Kinship care charity | England and Wales

CFAB CFAB | UK Branch of International Social Services

maethu cymru | foster wales

FOSTERING IN WALES

We believe in working together, sharing knowledge and building better futures for children – together. We're Foster Wales, the national network of 22 Welsh Local Authority fostering services.

AFKA CYMRU

Cymdeithas ar gyfer Maethu, Gofal Perthynas a Mabwysiadu

Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption

AFKA Cymru is Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption in Wales. AFKA Cymru promotes good practice across the breadth of permanency planning for children and young people. We are all about learning and development and offer advice, training and consultancy to professionals and members of the public to support best practice. AFKA Cymru is by law governed by St. David's Children Society under the terms of its charitable status.


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