

# 2.7 Million Children in the United States Live in Kinship Care

## What is kinship care?

Children who do not live with their parents but whose grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends provide them with a home are said to be in “kinship care.”

## Why are children in kinship care?

There are multiple reasons that children’s parents may be unable to offer care or support, including military service, mental health issues, substance use disorder, or incarceration.

## How do children enter kinship care?

Most children enter kinship care informally. Families make the arrangements on their own, or a child welfare agency or court facilitates.

Less often responsibility for children’s care and placement is given to the child welfare agency, usually by a court. These children are counted as in **foster care** and, when they are placed with kin, as in **both foster care and kinship care**.

In addition, some children leave foster care to live informally with kin, or to do so formally via legal **guardianship** or adoption.\*

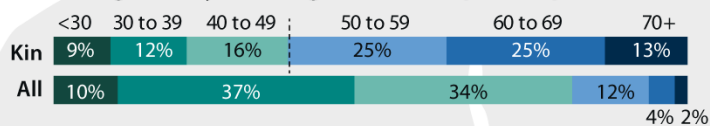
## Most children in kinship care live with a grandparent.

(Relationship of caregiver)



## Compared to all children in the United States, children in kinship care are more likely to . . .

### ▶ have a caregiver 50 years of age or older. (Age of caregiver)

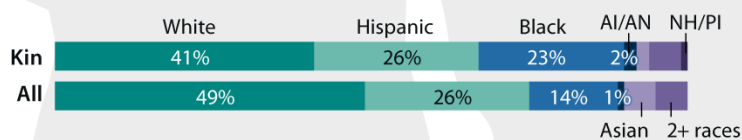


### ▶ live in a family with income below the poverty level. (Family income)

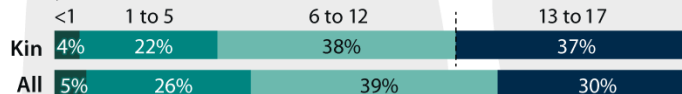


### ▶ be Black or American Indian/Alaska Native. (Race/ethnicity of child)

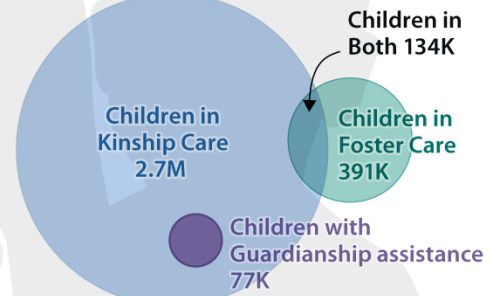
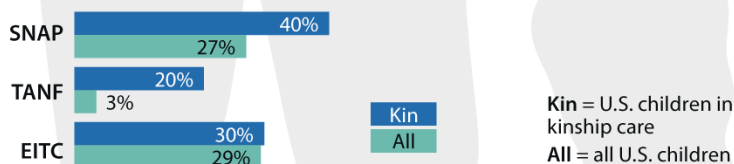
AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; NH/PI = Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander



### ▶ be 13 years of age or older. (Age of child)

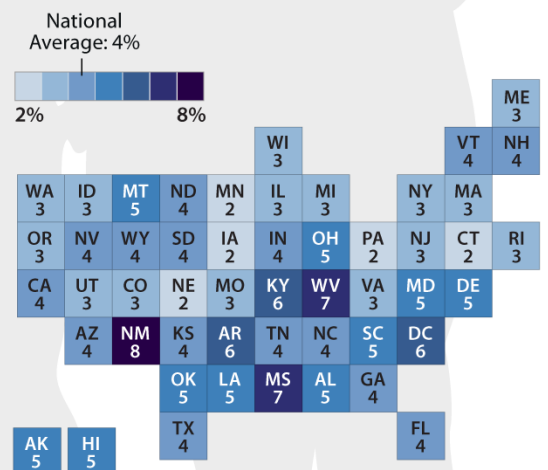


### ▶ live in a household that receives assistance from one or more of the following programs. (2018 data)



\*Children formally adopted by kin may not be counted as in kinship care because the relationship of the kin caregiver has legally changed to *parent*. “Children with guardianship assistance” includes those with or without Title IV-E support. See Sources.

## Percent of children living in kinship care by state



## Income support and accessing other services

Children in kinship care are generally eligible for a **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefit**, provided they are living with a grandparent or other relative by blood or adoption.

Children in formal foster care with a kin caregiver may be eligible for **foster care support under Title IV-E** of the Social Security Act if their caregiver is also a licensed foster parent. Under a federal rule finalized in September 2023, states are permitted to design licensing standards unique to kin who serve as foster parents. In states opting to make this change, the share of licensed kin caregivers is expected to increase, as is the share of children living with those kin who are eligible for Title IV-E foster care support. Those same children may also be eligible for **Title IV-E guardianship assistance** when they leave care if their kin caregiver becomes their legal guardian. Most children who leave foster care for formal adoption by kin are expected to be eligible for **Title IV-E adoption assistance**.

Federal support for evidence-based **kinship navigator programs** is also authorized under the Title IV-E program.

Information as of October 24, 2023, prepared by Emilie Stoltzfus, Specialist in Social Policy; Conor F. Boyle, Analyst in Social Policy; and Amber Wilhelm, Visual Information Specialist. For more information, see CRS Congressional Distribution Memorandum, “Characteristics of Children Living in Kinship Care,” by Conor F. Boyle.

**Sources:** Unless otherwise noted, figures represent CRS analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) data and estimate a three-year average of the years 2021-2023. The poverty measure used to determine children’s poverty status is the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). Data for public assistance receipt were estimated using the TRIM3 microsimulation model. Data on children in foster care are as of the last day of FY2021 from AFCARS Report# 29. Data on children receiving guardianship assistance include those with Title IV-E support (43,064) and those assisted without Title IV-E (33,449), as reported in Title IV-E expenditure claims data for FY2022 compiled by the federal Children’s Bureau. “Children” includes individuals under age 18 and for foster care and guardianship, may include some youth ages 18 through 20. The “United States” includes the 50 states and DC (CPS ASEC and TRIM3 analyses) or those jurisdictions and Puerto Rico (AFCARS data).

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