

# 2.8 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 arrangement on their own, or, in a process sometimes referred to as *kinship diversion* or *hidden foster care*, a child welfare agency facilitates direct placement with kin. Less often responsibility for children’s care and placement is formally 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, are counted as in **both kin care** and **foster care**.

In addition, children may leave foster care to live informally with kin, or to do so formally via court-approved **legal guardianship** or adoption.

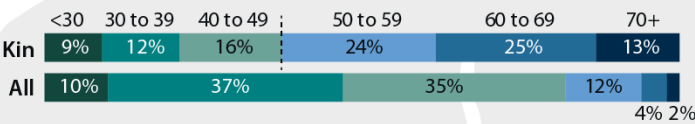
### Most children in kinship care live with a grandparent.

(Relationship of caregiver)

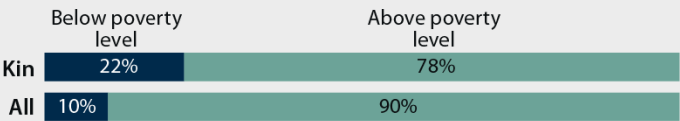


### Compared to all children in the United States, children in kinship care are more likely to . . .

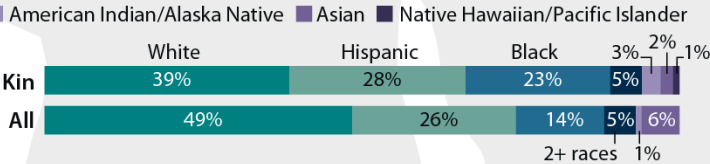
#### ► have a caregiver 50 years of age or older. (Age of caregiver)



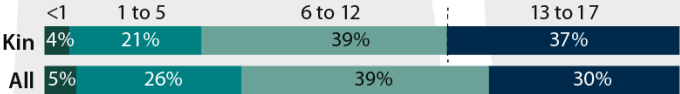
#### ► live in a family with income below the poverty level. (Family income)



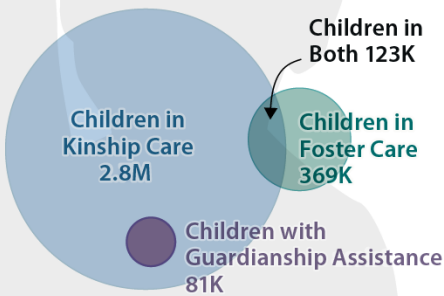
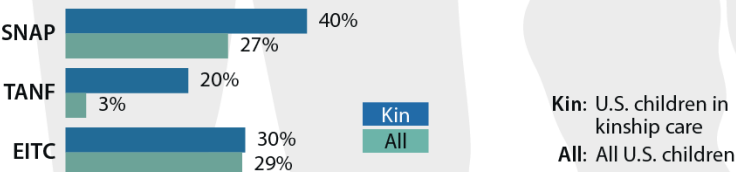
#### ► be Black or American Indian/Alaska Native. (Race/ethnicity of child)



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

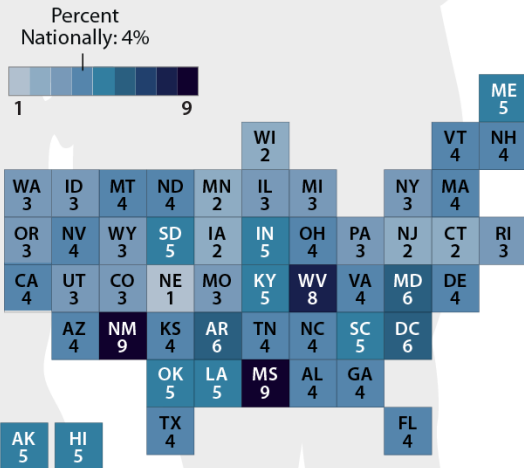


#### ► live in a household that receives assistance from one or more of the following programs. (2018 data)



**Notes:** The number of children experiencing *kinship diversion* is not known. Children formally adopted by kin may not be counted as in kinship care because their kin caregivers are now legally their *parents*.

### 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 kin. 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. Effective November 27, 2023, states may design unique licensing standards for kin caregivers of children in foster care. States opting to do this are expected to see an increase in licensed kin caregivers and, in turn, in children eligible for Title IV-E foster care support. When they leave care, those same children may be eligible for **Title IV-E guardianship assistance** if their licensed 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**.

**Kinship navigator programs** aim to help kin find and access needed services. States may receive federal support for evidence-based kinship navigator programs under the Title IV-E program. Separately, they may seek grants to evaluate/implement kinship navigators out of Title IV-B child welfare program funding. In either case, kin may be served with or without any current or prior connection to the child welfare agency.

Information as of February 11, 2025. Prepared by Emilie Stoltzfus, Specialist in Social Policy; Joe Angert, Research Assistant; and Amber Wilhelm, Visual Information Specialist.

**Sources:** **Demographics:** CRS analysis of Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) data, 3-year average estimates (2022-2024). **Public assistance receipt:** Estimated using the TRIM3 microsimulation model. **Number of children in foster care:** HHS, ACF, AFCARS Report #30; **number receiving guardianship assistance (with and without Title IV-E support):** FY2023 Title IV-E expenditure claims.

**Note:** Children include individuals under age 18 and for foster care and guardianship, may include youth ages 18 through 20.

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