

2.6 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*, 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, 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.

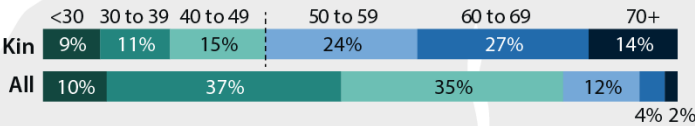
Most children in kinship care live with a grandparent.

(Relationship of caregiver)

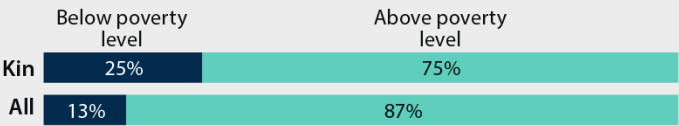


Compared to all children in the United States, children in kinship care are more likely to . . .

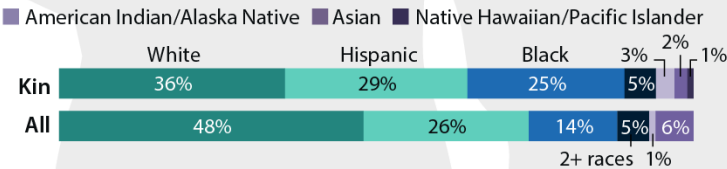
► have a caregiver 50 years of age or older. (Age of caregiver)



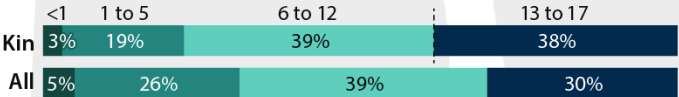
► live in a family with income below the poverty level. (Family income)



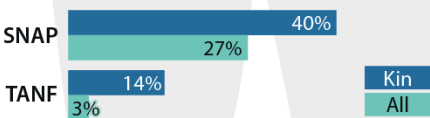
► be Black or American Indian/Alaska Native. (Race/ethnicity of child)



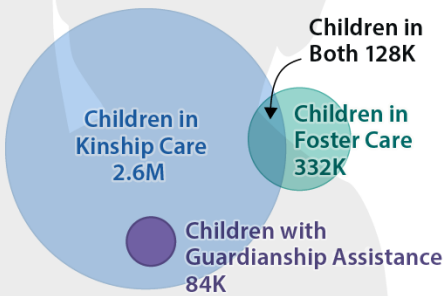
► be 13 years of age or older. (Age of child)



► be a recipient of certain public assistance.



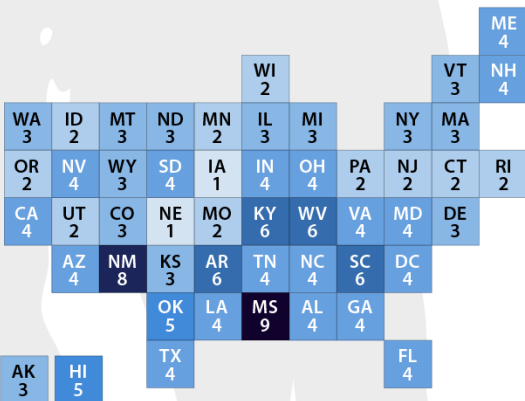
Note: Kin = U.S. children in kinship care; All= All U.S. children. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.



Note: Comparable data are not available on children formally adopted by relatives, or those living informally with a relative via kinship diversion or after foster care.

Percent of children living in kinship care by state

Percent Nationally: 4%



Income support and accessing other services

Children in kinship care are generally eligible for **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**, 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. As of early FY2024, states may design unique foster care licensing standards for kin caregivers. 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 and they may compete for Title IV-B funds to evaluate/implement navigator programs. In either case, kin may be served with or without any current or prior connection to the child welfare agency.

Sources: Demographics: CRS analysis of Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) data, 3-year average estimate (2023-2025). Children in kin care lived in a household with no parent present and which was headed by a relative or non-relative. The Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) was used to determine poverty status. **Public assistance receipt:** Estimated using TRIM3 microsimulation model (2023 benefit receipt data applied to 2024 ASEC child populations). **Children in foster care:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), AFCARS Dashboard, In Care on the Last Day of FY2025. **Children receiving guardianship assistance:** FY2024 Title IV-E expenditure claims, includes children with or without Title IV-E support in states providing Title IV-E guardianship assistance.

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

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